

OLD-TIME MOUNTAIN BANJO

By Art Rosenbaum

An Instruction Method for playing the old-time five-string mountain banjo
based on the styles of traditional banjo-pickers.

Oak Publications, New York

Dedicated to all the pickers and singers who made this music over the years.

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INTRODUCTION

The five-string banjo has enjoyed a renewed popularity during the last twenty years and is now firmly re-established at many levels of American musical culture. Earl Scruggs and the Bluegrass musicians who followed him have brought the banjo back to commercial country music in a most spectacular way; Pete Seeger's accomplishment in making the banjo the spark of the great folk music revival in the cities is too well known to need repeating; Paul Cadwell has even found an audience for turn of the century classical banjo styles. The five-string banjo ripples away in beer commercials: one of the Monkees varies the usual beat sound of his group with a banjo rendition of a tune that an eight year old student of mine thinks is called *Crippled Creep*. The five-string banjo is no longer a curiosity in danger of extinction nor is the specific aspect of its music that this manual is devoted to, the traditional Appalachian styles. People all over the country have heard Clarence Ashley, Frank Proffitt, Roscoe Holcomb, and Dock Boggs, and know these musicians and many more from recordings. They have gained an appreciation of the special qualities of the old-time mountain banjo styles that distinguish them from the other kinds of music that the instrument can produce. This book is directed to those, whether they be beginners or players of some experience, who are interested in picking and singing the old banjo music that was most popular in the South in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

There is a tendency to consider mountain banjo music as something pretty quaint and old-fashioned, albeit lively and exciting. It is important to realize that comparatively recently this was the most far out music in Appalachia. The good people who guided the early collector Cecil Sharp through the hills fifty years ago somehow arranged it so that he didn't hear one banjo breakdown or a single old ballad set to banjo accompaniment, all the greater his loss. It took a native of the region, Josiah Combs, to give us the first description of the mountain minstrel. Writing in his doctoral dissertation, *Folk-songs du Midi des Etats-Unis*, at the Sorbonne in the nineteen twenties, he gave it in the form of this admittedly comic and slanted speech of a highland judge to the grand jury: "Gentlemen: whenever you see a great big overgrown buck sitting at the mouth of some holler, or at the forks of some road, with a big slouch hat on, a blue celluloid collar, a celluloid, artificial red rose in his coat lapel, a banjo strung across his breast, and a-pickin' of *Sourwood Mountain*, fine that man, gentlemen, fine him! For if he hasn't already done something, he's a-goin' to." Combs goes beyond this, pointing out that the mountain banjo picker borrowed an instrument and many of the songs of the Negro American and reworked them in his original way. We have heard a lot of this music by now and have met friendly elderly gentlemen, happy to share their music with the interested stranger. These were the wild boys of Combs' youth, the banjo pickin' crowd that Jean Ritchie's mother warned her of. And while even in the old

days many ordinary mountain farmers and miners and housewives kept a banjo for evening family entertainment on the porch or to play at neighborhood winter frolics, it is true enough that the banjo picker often adopted the rowdy ways of the hard-living, moonshine-drinking segment of the mountain community, the antic ways of the odd-ball entertainer, the eccentricities of the creative personality.

Create he did. He made a whole family of musical styles based on the unique rhythmic possibilities of that extraordinary Afro-American development, the five-string banjo, the Negro songs and playing techniques that had grown up with it, the ancient modal vocal melodies his grandfathers had brought from the British Isles, and the hundreds of American and Scotch-Irish dance tunes known to the country fiddler. He was the first in hundreds of years, as Alan Lomax has pointed out, to make a viable accompanying style for the old ballads; and he went further, creating a new class of "banjo songs" which were neither ballads nor dance tunes but were part-lyric, part-narrative pieces, loose successions of evocative verses tied together by the singer's mood and the compelling rhythms and tonality of the banjo.

I have begun the introduction to what is essentially a practical "how to" book with this brief characterization and appreciation of the mountain banjo picker and his music because I feel strongly that folk music style is best approached through an empathy with (but not a romanticizing of) the culture and the individuals who made it. The best traditional style banjo pickers of the folk music revival have known personally some of the old-timers and have acquired a feeling for the intangibles that make the music work. The best prevention for reading into a musical style values foreign to it is to know it well and honestly. A lot of listening to the many recordings now available will help in this.

A book like this one cannot, however, concern itself with intangibles beyond making the student aware of their existence. It can explain how to hold the hand in order to get certain sounds, how to twist the banjo into some of the tunings that give its music much of its character. It can explain and illustrate the interrelationship of banjo playing and singing and comment on how the banjo can work with other traditional instruments. Mountain banjo picking is highly idiosyncratic and varied, but fortunately there are just a few basic ways of sounding the strings; I have given the fundamentals of these styles and enough examples of the ways they are elaborated on to give the student a good deal to go on for almost anything he might want to play.

Again, this is meant to be a practical method and not a historical or musicological study of mountain banjo style, although some historical and analytical comments are interspersed throughout. This book will serve you best if you supplement it in several ways. First, do as much listening as possible to live performers or recordings; whenever possible check the transcriptions against the recorded sources. You should also be familiar with Pete Seeger's classic *How to Play the Five-String Banjo*, Oak Publications, which incidentally, started me off quite a few years ago. His book includes some examples in traditional style; in addition there is much valuable material on general music theory, chords, the history of the banjo, the purchase and care of an instrument, and an excellent chapter on Bluegrass banjo. *The New Lost City Ramblers Song Book* (Oak, 1964) has a few good banjo transcriptions, interesting essays on old-time hillbilly and string band music by John Cohen and Mike Seeger, and, of course, scores of wonderful songs transcribed by Hally Wood, mostly from commercial recordings made during the great era of early country music in the twenties and thirties. Finally, a good banjo teacher is invaluable. But if it is the traditional mountain music you are keen on learning, make sure that your instructor is knowledgeable and shares your bias. Beware of the folk banjo teacher who says, "Oh yes, I can teach you that stuff too."

You don't have to know how to read music to use this book. That ability will help you mainly in learning the vocal parts to the songs given, but in most cases the banjo part given in tablature will help you out in the tune of the song. Tablature is a crystal clear way of notating banjo music, and trust me when I maintain that you will be able to read it in short

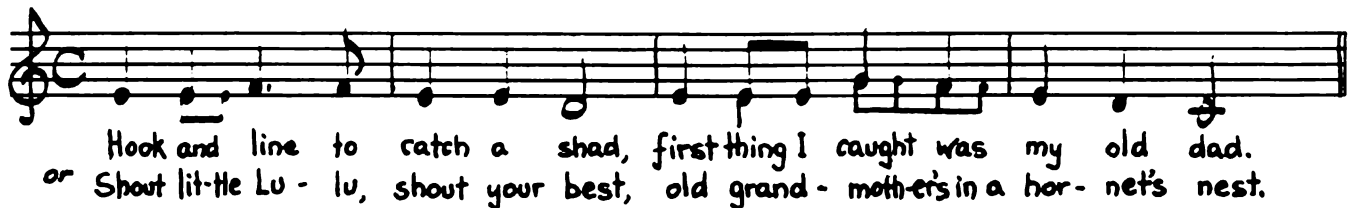
order even if you've never seen it before. The first few examples of banjo music are given in both standard music notation and tablature to help those whose main orientation is written music. You must remember that traditionally this music is learned by ear and example without the use of any notation; tablature and other forms of notation are merely useful devices that give you something specific and explicit to work from while you are learning. They should be abandoned as soon as you have mastered what they teach. For those musicians who are not interested in learning the banjo but who want to see what this music looks like on paper, don't be disappointed that not everything is set down in music—it's better not to trust me but go to the original recordings to see what's happening!

But for the student with a banjo all strung up and ready to go, try your hand at the old-time banjo styles on the following pages. Get the music to flow from your fingers and voice with passion and conviction and a bit of humor and you will become part of one of the most expressive and exciting folk music styles to arise in America.



I. Beginning Up- and Down-Picking

Ask an old-time Kentucky banjo picker what the first tune he learned was, and he will most likely answer *Hook and Line*. This is a simple ditty of four bars that requires very little of the left hand while the beginner is concentrating on getting his right hand to learn the rudiments of the style called down-picking, frailing, rapping, or a number of other terms; yet it is a catchy enough melody to hold up pretty well after some repetition. As in many similar tunes, there are some verses that can be sung right along with the banjo:



This adds a little playful aggression toward one's elders to liven up the first efforts at banjo picking.

Tune your banjo like this for *Hook and Line*:

The 4th string is C (C below middle C on a piano)
The 3rd string is G (this can be found on a guitar pitch pipe)
The 2nd string is C (middle C, an octave up from the 4th)
The 1st string is D
The 5th string is G (an octave up from the 3rd)

You can check the tuning like this:

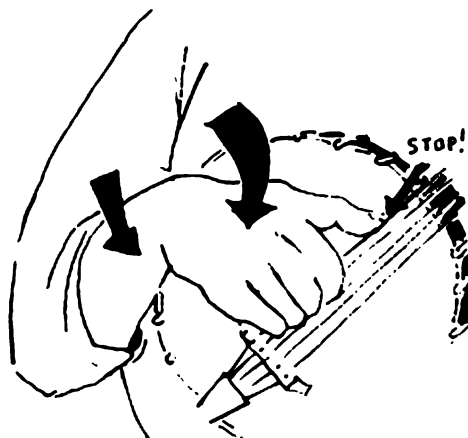
The 3rd string should match the 4th, stopped at the 7th fret
The 2nd should match 3 at the 5th
The 1st should match 2 at the 2nd
The 5th should match 1 at the 5th

This is not the "standard" C tuning (G^CGBD) but is a variant just as commonly used in the mountains.

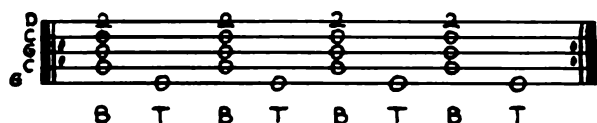
You should be seated with the banjo resting in your lap, the head pretty much vertical with the middle of your right forearm resting on the top of the rim so that the hand can sound the strings; the left thumb should be at right angles to the back of the neck and the hand brought around under the neck so that the fingertips can stop the strings cleanly behind the frets.

Put your index finger behind the 2nd fret of the 1st string. All the strings strummed together should produce a C chord. Now, hold your right hand over the banjo head, fingers curled back and kept together (not tightly), wrist bent slightly forward, so that a downward movement of both the hand and wrist will produce a brisk brush over the strings. Do this now: brush down so that the backs of the nails sound the strings. The wrist moves more than the forearm but the forearm moves too.

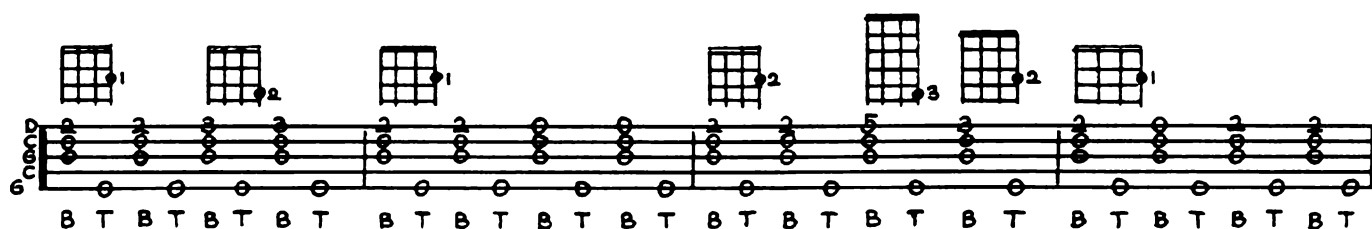
As you do this, trail the thumb behind so that it catches on the 5th or thumb string, catches, but does not sound. The string is sounded on the off-beat with a slight flexing of the thumb as the hand rises to be in position to come down again.



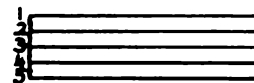
This would be described like this in TABLATURE; *



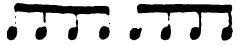


Repeat this again and again until you get a good one-and-two-and rhythm. Then try the whole tune in this brush-thumb brush-thumb style:

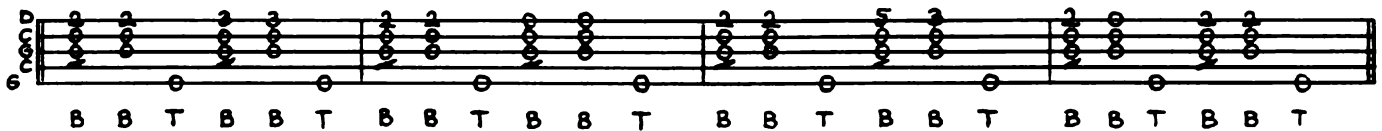


* TABLATURE is a form of notation that shows in consecutive fashion what happens on a fretted instrument. In short, the *lines* represent the *strings* and *numbers* represent the *frets* behind which the given string is stopped, or an open string (O), as the case may be. Shown on the next page is how the string is sounded – B for downward brush, T for thumb. Other signs will be explained as the techniques they describe are introduced.




In my kind of tablature measure divisions will be used, but I'll omit the music-style sticks and flags that are often used in tablature to indicate rhythm. Instead I consider the tablature numbers to be the most common rhythmic unit—the short (generally eighth) note. A line under the number doubles its time value. Thus the common pattern: BUMP dit-ty bum-pa dit-ty would be shown like this in tab:


Notice that the left hand walks the melody up and down the first string as the right hand keeps up the rudimentary rhythm  When you can play this with ease try the tune another way, omitting the first and third thumb notes in each measure. This has the effect of doubling the time of the first and third brushes, producing the characteristic BUMP dit-ty () rhythm. Or try thinking of the same rhythm articulated in this manner:  If you wish, you can continue to bring the thumb to rest on the 5th string after the first and third brushes—just make sure not to sound it.



Let's add two more elements to this tune: 1) the zeroing in on a single string for a lead note and 2) hammering and pulling.

- 1 – Try this: with the right hand and wrist in the *same* position as before but with the index finger advanced a fraction of an inch in front of the other fingers, strike the whole hand downward, hitting the second string. The nail of the index sounds the second string, is stopped by the first string, and bounces up, bringing the whole hand with it. Now you are in position to come down again with the brush, followed by the fifth string, as before.
- 2 – Hammering and pulling are two techniques so common to most styles of traditional banjo picking that they should be incorporated into your playing right at the outset. They can serve rhythmic and melodic functions and add fluidity to the music.

which is the equivalent of this: 

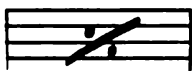
or this: 

Amazingly this simple rhythmic system will tell you, in a schematic way, practically everything you'll need to know (the few exceptions will be indicated). Of course a descriptive transcription of a performance would show slight variations in duration, and show certain notes to be sustained as others are played. But most of this will come naturally as you begin to grasp the idiom.

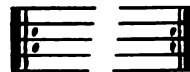
Here are various symbols, some borrowed from music notation, that are used in the tablature notation of many of the songs.

 hold note


 accent note



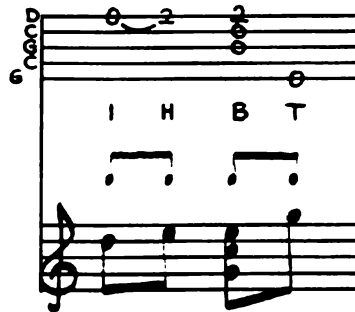
repeat previous measure



repeat whole passage

 sliding attack, from the fret below

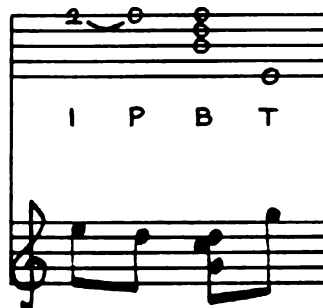
Hammering is simply driving a finger of the left hand down onto the fingerboard so that a note is sounded. This almost invariably occurs on an off-beat after the right hand has sounded a note on the same or another string, or has brushed a chord. Here is an example shown in both tablature and music:



The right index finger strikes the first string open; then the left index, which has been hovering above the second fret of the first string, comes down, sounding the note (E in this case). This finger remains where it is while the right hand, which has bounced up, comes down, sounding the chord. The fifth string is then played as before.

Pulling, too, nearly always comes on an off-beat and is simply the plucking, by a finger of the *left* hand, of a note already fretted. (Often, though not always, this note has just been sounded.)

For instance:



The right index finger has struck the 1st string stopped at the second fret. Then the finger that was fretting the string, the left index, neatly pulls *down* and *away* so that the open 1st string (D) is heard.

The tablature notation for hammering is H, for pulling P. In addition a linking mark will be used so that you can see at a glance what is happening (naturally 0 3 or 3 5 would be hammers, 3 0 or 3 2 would be pulls). However, don't be misled into thinking that the two notes are slurred together. The note before the hammered or pulled note is not a grace note but gets its half beat just as the hammered or pulled one does

Now try *Hook and Line*, modified with some single string leads and of course some hammering and pulling.

HOOK AND LINE

The musical score is written for a banjo and voice. The banjo part is on a single staff with a C-clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It consists of four measures. The first measure starts with a G-clef and a key signature of one flat. The vocal melody is written on a single staff with a C-clef and a key signature of one flat. It consists of four measures. The lyrics are written below the vocal staff. The banjo part includes fingerings: 1st finger, 2nd, 1st, 1st, 3rd, 1st, and 1st. The lyrics are: 'Hook and line to catch a shad, First thing I caught was my old dad. Pole broke and I got mad, Right to the bottom went my old dad! Shout a nickle, shout a dime, Shout little Lulu any old time. Shout little Lulu, shout your best, Your old grandmother's in a hornet's nest! (spoken:) Yes sir! Shout, shout, shout, shout! What in hell are you shoutin' about?'

Hook and line to catch a shad,
First thing I caught was my old dad.

Pole broke and I got mad,
Right to the bottom went my old dad!

Shout a nickle, shout a dime,
Shout little Lulu any old time.

Shout little Lulu, shout your best,
Your old grandmother's in a hornet's nest!
(spoken:) Yes sir!

Shout, shout, shout, shout!
What in hell are you shoutin' about?

There is a lot crammed into this piece if you are starting from scratch. Here are some important things to consider:

- 1 – Do not get so involved in hitting the right notes that you forget you are down-picking! Certainly you want accuracy; but this will come with practice, and the attack and bounce of this style must not be sacrificed even while you are working out a new piece like this note for note. This way of thinking about it may help: down-picking slowly means that the chunks of time *between* the notes are longer. Each rap and recoil remains swift. You are *not* just plucking downwards.
- 2 – Most of the lead notes here are on the 1st string. This means that you don't have a string beyond the one you hit to bounce up from, but try not to thump into the banjo head. The descent must be checked *after* the 1st string is struck. Then the hand springs back as usual.
- 3 – In the first measure you hammer from the 2nd fret up to the 3rd, using the left index (1st) and 2nd fingers; in the third measure you pull from the 5th fret down to the 3rd. You need not always hammer up from an open string or pull down to an open one.

One of the reasons that the five-string banjo took root in the Appalachians was that it lent itself so well to playing the modal melodies that the Scotch-Irish mountain people had brought with them from the British Isles. Many mountain musicians will still tell you that the thumb string was a substitute for the bagpipe drone. Surely the old British pipe and vocal musics were related, but a more important factor is the fact that the banjo can be put into various tunings that do no violence at all to the modal songs or tunes they accompany or play.

Now a tune is not always clearly modal or not modal. In *Hook and Line* a modal feeling emerged when the 1st string was left open and this chord was played:



When the string was stopped at the 2nd fret you hear a good old major triad:



If you have not listened to a lot of mountain banjo music you might find the first example a bit discordant. Don't worry, it's supposed to sound that way.

But now let us try another tuning with a more consistent modal flavor. From the two C tuning, the one we used for *Hook and Line*, raise the 4th string a whole tone from C to D. Before turning the peg, play the 4th string at the 2nd fret: this is the note you want. Now tune the string up. Test it against the open 1st, also D, but an octave higher.

Now you are in the tuning that Pete Seeger has called mountain minor, one that works out well for pieces in the dorian mode, one of the commonest of the old modes in the mountains. Play *Shady Grove*, a lonesome lyric piece that is often picked on the banjo.



SHADY GROVE

I B T I B T I P B T I B T I B T I H I I H B T I B T
Sha - dy Grove my true love, Sha - dy Grove my dar - lin',

I B T I P B T I P I P I H B T I H B T I I I B T I B T
Sha - dy Grove my true love, I'm a - goin' up to Har - lan.

Wish I was in Shady Grove, sittin' in a rockin' chair,
And if the blues don't let me alone, rock away from here.

Once I had an old banjo; strings were made of twine.
The only tune it could play was "Trouble on My Mind."

Went to see my Shady Grove, she was standin' in the door,
Shoes and stockin's in her hand: little bare feet on the floor.

Peaches in the summertime, apples in the fall;
If I don't get the girl I love, don't want none at all.

Notes:

- 1 – If you don't sing this song, listen to some records, Pete Steele or Jean Ritchie, for example. However, the banjo here plays the melody right along with the voice, so the vocal line can be picked up as you learn the tune.
- 2 – In this version all the notes at the 2nd fret are played by the left 2nd finger and all those at the 3rd fret by the third finger. Hold the left hand still, let your fingers do the walking, and they'll soon learn to find the notes without your looking.
- 3 – The last beat of the 3rd measure and the 3rd and 4th beats of the 7th measure are quarter notes struck just as any lead notes would be.
- 4 – Get in the habit of reading the tablature accurately. Notice which hammered notes remain fretted when a chord is sounded, etc. Tablature is just a useful device for learning to be set aside once what it teaches is mastered, but take pains to use it to the fullest before trying to go off on your own.

What I have done thus far is to present the essentials of down-picking or frailing, a style that will be explored much more fully in Chapter III. This is not the easiest style to start with. But many people do start with it, and if you have been able to get the hang of what is essentially a rather awkward way of playing a stringed instrument, striking downward, you are in good shape. Practice the two tunes given as examples until you get a nice chunky, articulated sound. You will be able to achieve a considerable range of shading and style if you have the basic movements down well.

Two points should be reiterated: don't forget to bring the thumb to rest on the 5th string as the hand comes down on the 2nd and 3rd beats of a measure; and keep the right wrist flexed forward. You may see city banjo pickers and even some traditional musicians frailing the banjo with their wrists straight, or even bent backwards; but even if you like the sound they get, you will be able to produce it holding the wrist as I suggest and do much more that they would find difficult.

Try experimenting with other tunes you know: once you have learned the standard G tuning explained below, many more possibilities will suggest themselves. It is good to get a broad base of many tunes and songs, played in a simple manner, before you attempt more complicated things.

UP-PICKING AND THE G TUNING

If simple down-picking has come easily for you, fine! If you have had some trouble with it you may want to postpone learning it while you work on the style we'll call up-picking (Pete Seeger's "basic strum"), a somewhat easier technique to get the knack of. Remember that one can commence learning traditional banjo picking with any of the basic styles. A youngster learning to pick in the Southern mountains might begin with up-picking, down-picking, two-finger or even three-finger picking depending on which of these styles happened to be current at the time, or what style his father or uncle favored, or if several ways of picking were to be heard, whichever one most caught his fancy.

Up-picking is set up similarly to down-picking. There is a lead note, a brush across the strings followed by the thumb sounding the 5th string. The difference is this: the lead notes are sounded by the index finger picking *up* on a single string rather than the downward rapping heard in down-picking. Some players hold their hand fairly still, making the fingers do most of the work; some even brace the 3rd finger on the head and pick up *and* strum down with the index finger. I'd suggest, however, that your whole hand rise as the index picks the first note; then brush down with a falling movement of the wrist, catching the thumb on the 5th string just as you did in down-picking. Next, pluck the 5th string but *do not* bounce the hand up--you want to be in position to pluck *up* on the next lead note.

For the first tune illustrating this style, get your banjo in the G tuning, perhaps the most widely used and versatile of the tunings employed by traditional players. From the mountain minor tuning, lower the 2nd string a semi-tone from D to B. (Test the 2nd string by *fretting* the 3rd (G) string at the 4th fret. You now should have ^GDGBD, an open G chord.)

Some pieces are quite easy to pick out in this tuning. Try *Sourwood Mountain*, remembering that you are now picking *up* on the lead notes (remember too your celluloid collar and celluloid red rose).

SOURWOOD MOUNTAIN

2nd fing. 3rd fing.

I B T I B T I B T I I I B T I H B T I P I P I B T

Chick-ens a-crow-in' on Sourwood Moun-tain, Hey de-ing-dang diddle al-lee day. So

I B T I B T I P B T I P B T I B T I H B T I P I P I B T

many pretty girls I just can't count 'em, Hey de-ing - dang diddle al-lee day.

My true love is a sun-burnt daisy, etc.
If I don't get her I'll go crazy, etc.

My true love's at the head of the holler...
She won't come and I won't foller...

Big dog'll bark and the little one'll bite you...
Big girl'll court but the little one'll marry you...

Ducks in the mill pond, geese in the ocean...
Devil's in the women when they take a notion...

As well as working around the tonic G chord in this tuning, you can also add the dominant and sub-dominant chords when a tune calls for that kind of harmonization. These chords are very easily made:



Tinker around with any songs you may know using the open G and these other two chords. First figure out an accompaniment using a straight up-picking pattern enlivened with some hammered or pulled notes. Then pick out the melody finding the needed notes in or around the chords.

Here is a simple version of an old Negro banjo song that made its way up into the mountains some time before the turn of the century.

LYNCHBURG TOWN

The musical score for "Lynchburg Town" is presented in two systems. Each system consists of a banjo staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#), a line of lyrics, and a piano accompaniment staff with a treble clef. The banjo staff includes chord symbols (G, C, G, D7, C, G, D7, G) and fret numbers (2, 3, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2). The lyrics are: "Goin' down to town, goin' down to town; Goin' down to Lynchburg town, to take my 'bacco down."

Times a-gettin' hard,
Money's gettin' scarce.
Pay me for the tobacco, boys,
Before I leave this place.

I went down to town,
To get me a jug of wine.
They tied me up to a whippin' post.
And give me forty-nine.

I went down to town,
To get me a jug of gin.
They tied me up to another post
And give me hell again!

When the banjo is tuned to an open chord it is much easier to chord high on the neck. The first banjos played in the mountains were fretless (see Chapter IV) and this fact discouraged the early musicians from doing much noting above the first position and especially from trying to fret more than one string at a time high on the neck; instead, we conjecture, they developed the tunings that permitted many kinds of melodies to be played down in the first position. However when a second wave of Negro musical influence in the early part of this century brought into popularity some blues songs that fairly cried out for a chord approach, the mountain pickers learned that they could simply bar one finger across four strings at the 5th fret (the mail-order fretted banjos were then making their appearance) and get a C major chord when the instrument was tuned to an open G chord. Likewise a barre at the 7th fret makes a D chord and one at the 12th fret produces a G chord an octave higher

than the open chord. This set-up worked beautifully for songs like *Going Down the Road Feeling Bad*. This is perhaps the most widely known modern folk song in the South and will reappear in two different forms later in this book. The present version was adapted from the playing and singing of Smoky Mountain Cass Moore, a lanky North Carolinian who was working in the Michigan blueberry fields when I met him in 1957 and could sing with real conviction the song that has come to be the theme song of the migrant farm workers.

GOING DOWN THE ROAD FEELING BAD

VOCAL LINE (Deliberately - not too fast)

The musical score is written for guitar and voice. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The guitar part includes a 'Vocal Line' and a 'Guitar Line' with tablature. The vocal line is written in a staff with a treble clef. The guitar line is written in a staff with a treble clef and includes a 'Vocal Line' and a 'Guitar Line' with tablature. The tablature is written in a staff with a treble clef and includes a 'Vocal Line' and a 'Guitar Line' with tablature.

First System:

Vocal: Go - in' down the road feel - in' bad, goin' down this_

Guitar: Up G C

Tab: 12 12 12 12 14 12 12 5 5 5 5 5 5

Second System:

Vocal: road feel - in' bad, goin' down this_ road feel - in'

Guitar: C G C

Tab: 7 7 5 5 5 7 7 5 5 5 7 7 5 5 5

Third System:

Vocal: bad, well I ain't gon - na be treat-ed this - a way.

Guitar: G D G

Tab: 7 9 12 12 12 9 7 7 9 7 7 5 5 5 5

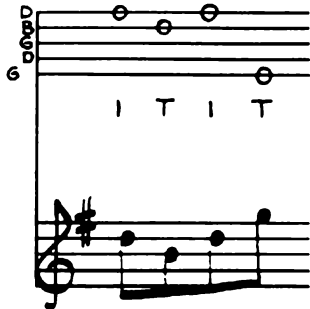
Goin' where the weather suits my clothes
Well, I ain't gonna be treated this a-way.

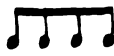
Way down in jail on my knees
Well, I ain't gonna be treated this a-way.


Goin' where the water tastes like wine
Well, I ain't gonna be treated this a-way.

Notes:

- 1 – You can convert *Sourwood Mountain* and *Lynchburg Town* just as they are written into down-picking style, but this tune is intended to be played strictly in up-picking.
- 2 – At several points there occurs the following pattern:



This is what Seeger calls "double thumbing." With the hand more or less stationary the index finger picks up on a lead note, most often the 1st string. Then the thumb picks one of the lower inside strings. Next the index plays the first string again followed by the thumb on the 5th string. The rhythm is always one-and two-and . If the tune demands it, the lead notes can change during the sequence. See the next tune for examples.

- 3 – The slide (sl) in the tenth measure is another commonly used technique in this and other styles. In this case the right index picks up on the 1st string, stopped by the left index at the 7th fret. Then the left index slides smartly up to the 9th fret, never leaving the finger board so that the tone is sustained. The rhythm is , one-and.

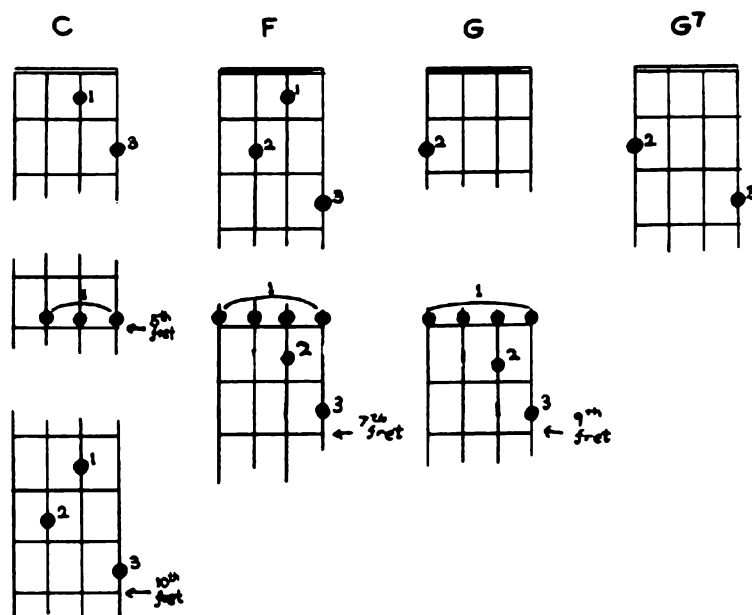


- 4 – In both the 6th and 9th measures of tablature, the lead note is held for two beats, denoted by the double underlines. The third beat is a rake of the back of the finger nails across the strings—it takes just one beat but the hand moves more slowly so there is some sense of the individual notes. Then the thumb plays the 5th string and this note, too, gets a whole beat.
- 5 – The music given is what the voice sings and is not a transcription of the banjo part. I hope that you have by now become skilled enough in reading tablature that it is self-explanatory. Henceforth musical notation will be used for the vocal lines with the banjo tablature directly below. This will be especially useful in songs where the banjo and voice interweave in a contrapuntal manner.

THE STANDARD C TUNING

The standard C tuning is also frequently used for chord work. It was the basis for most of the 19th century banjo methods and the written banjo literature (which pertain only tangentially to traditional Southern banjo styles.) The notes of this tuning, ^GCGBD, are the names of the banjo strings you buy. But for our purposes the standard C tuning is just one of many tunings, albeit a very useful one.

If you are in the G tuning, lower the 4th string a whole tone from D to C. If you are in the double C tuning, drop the 2nd string from C to B. Here are the principal chords.



As you did with the G tuning, try to work out some song accompaniments using these chords, then some simple melodies.

Try this song which will familiarize you with the C tuning and give you some practice in double thumbing.

FREE LITTLE BIRD AS I CAN BE

VOCAL LINE

Take me home little birdie, take me home;
Take me home by the light of the moon.
Moon out all night, stars a-shinin' bright,
Take me home, little birdie, take me home.

If I was a little bird
I'd not build my nest on the ground;
I'd build my nest in the sour apple tree
Where the wild boys couldn't tear it down.

With this ditty we can conclude the introduction to basic down and up-picking. The tunes given are good straightforward banjo stuff and if you learn them well they will provide a firm foundation for the more complex down-picking in Chapters III and IV and some of the material in the next chapter, as well as for much that you can take off recordings or work out on your own.



II. Two-Finger Picking

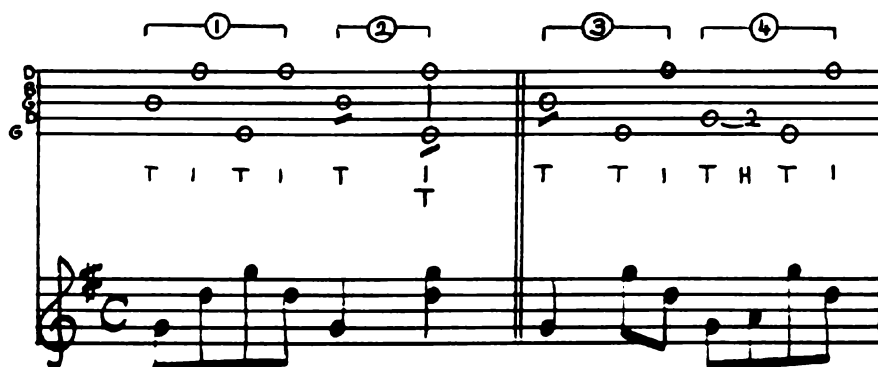
TWO APPROACHES

Old-time musicians in the Southern mountains employ various sorts of picking which use the thumb and index finger. Two-finger picking is probably not as old as down-picking, which many old-timers still associate with Ante Bellum "slavery days" music; but it has provided song accompaniments for at least three generations of banjo players (it is less frequently used than down-picking for playing dance tunes.)


There are two basic forms of two-finger picking—thumb lead and index finger lead—and we'll consider them separately.

The thumb lead style is most common in Eastern Kentucky. Listen to records of performers like Roscoe Holcomb, Pete Steele, and B. F. Shelton to get an idea of what can be done with it.

Here are the basic mechanics: the right hand is held in place with the three fingers not used braced on the head while the thumb alternates between a lead on the inside strings and the fifth string and the index carries on a drone on the first string sounded on the off-beats. Try these patterns:



This is practically all you need to know. Try playing each half measure over and over—then each measure as a sequence. Some players use 1 as the basis for their style—a rippling succession of short notes with the melody finding its way in on the thumb lead notes. Others like Pete Steele base their playing on 1 and 2 combined, with a more intense driving ef-

fect resulting from the syncopation of the final pinch of the outside strings. Pattern 3 provides a  BUMP-ditty rhythm, and 4 adds the fluidity of a hammer or a pull to a style based on any of the other patterns or to any combination. Here is how a simple tune might sound in a two-finger style:

GROUND HOG



Load-en up your gun and whis-tle up your dog, load-en up your gun and

whis-tle up your dog we're off to the wild woods to hunt ground hog,

ground hog!

Whet up your ax and whistle up your dog, (2)
We're off to the woods to ketch a ground hog,
Ground hog!

Old Joe Digger, Sam and Dave, (2)
Went a-hog huntin' hard as they could stave,
Ground hog!

Down the holler and up the side, (2)
Y' get ten cents for the ground hog hide,
Ground hog!

Up run Sam with a forked pole, (2)
To twist that ground hog out-a his hole,
Ground hog!

Sam held the gun and Dave pulled the trigger, (2)
But the one killed the hog was old Joe Digger,
Ground hog!

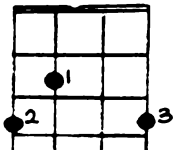
Up come Suzie with a snigger and a grin, (2)
Ground hog grease all over her chin,
Ground hog!

Old Aunt Sally was the mother of 'em all, (2)
Fed 'em on ground hog before they could crawl,
Ground hog!

The vocal melody here pretty much follows the thumb notes on the inside strings. If you are familiar with this tune try varying the style, favoring one or another pattern, adding hammers or pulls—just be careful to preserve the melody (or a variant that you may know) and the metric structure.

The vocal style distinctive of East Kentucky is a treble, tight-throated rubato parlando, irregular and highly ornamented. Two-finger banjo playing in the hands of gifted folk musicians can complement it perfectly. The driving rhythm provides a strong support for the voice while the hammered and pulled melody notes can follow many of the turns of the voice. The continuing resonance of the pinched secondary beats creates a background of sonority. This style is even more adaptable than down-picking to irregularities of meter.

Roscoe Holcomb of Daisy, Kentucky, does a version of the old Western song *The Buffalo Skinners* on Folkways FA 2363. He uses a tuning we'll call the F tuning, identical to the minor tuning except for the 5th string which is tuned down a whole tone to F (match with the 1st string 3rd fret).



This fingering now makes an F chord and together with the open strings provides most of the melody notes; shift the left index to the 2nd fret of the 2nd string to slip over into the relative minor.

THE HILLS OF MEXICO

VOCAL LINE

When I's _____

— in old Fort Worth — in eight- een and eight- y three, _____

T I T I T T T I T I T H T T I T I T T T T I T I T I T T T I T I T I T T

some old Mex - i - can cow - boy

T I T I T T T I T I T T T I T T T I T T

come step -

T I T I T T T I T I T T I T I T T I T I T T

ping up to me, say - ing

T I T I T P T I T I T T T I T I T T T I T I

"How are you young fel - la, how

T T I T T T H T I T T I T I T T I T I T

would you like to go, for to

T T T T T T T P T P T T T T T T T T H T

spend an- oth- er sea- son with

T T T T T T T T T T T T T T P T T H T T T T

me in Mex- i- co?

T P T T T P T T T T T T T T T T T T T T T

"Lord, I have no employment" back to him did say.
 "Well it's according to your wages and according to your pay."
 "I will pay to you good wages, it's open to you to go,
 "If you spend another season with me in Mexico."

It's when the time was over it's back to home did go;
 How the bells they did ring, the whistles they did blow.
 How the bells they did ring, the whistles they did blow.
 In that God-forsaken country in the hills of Mexico.

Note that in two passages the thumb plays melody notes on the first string. This is a bit awkward in this style. Pete Steele in cases when the melody rises above the range of the low positions of the second string, switches to an index finger lead. I'll give you his superb version of the classic American banjo murder ballad, *Pretty Polly* as an example. In this case I'll let you try to fit the banjo to the sung part (the part of the banjo break that corresponds to the vocal line begins at the sixth measure). Listen to the Library of Congress recording AAFS L1 to learn how the banjo and voice work together.

PRETTY POLLY

VOCAL LINE

The musical score is written on five staves in 2/4 time. The melody is simple and catchy, with lyrics written below the notes. The lyrics are: "Pret-ty Pol-ly, pret-ty Pol-ly come and go _____ a - way with me, pret-ty Pol-ly, pret-ty Pol-ly come and go with me, _____ pret-ty Pol-ly, pret-ty Pol-ly come and go _____ with me, _____ be - fore _____ we get mar-ried some plea - sure to see. _____".

"Pretty Willie, pretty Willie, I fear your way, (3)
You have taken my body all out astray."

He led her over the hills and the valleys so deep, (3)
And at last pretty Polly began to weep.

She threw her arms around him she suffered no fear, (3)
"How can you kill a poor girl that loves you so dear?"

He stabbed her to the heart and the blood it did flow, (3)
And into the grave Pretty Polly did go.

He threw some dirt o'er her and turned to go home, (3)
Left nothing behind but the birds to mourn.

BANJO BREAK

The musical score for 'BANJO BREAK' consists of six staves. Each staff is written on a five-line treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation uses eighth notes and rests to represent beats. Below each staff, there are letters (T, H, P, I) and vertical lines indicating the timing and fingering of the notes. The first staff starts with a 'G' and a '2' in a circle. The second staff has a '3' in a circle. The third staff has a '2' in a circle. The fourth staff has a '3' in a circle. The fifth staff has a '2' in a circle. The sixth staff has a '3' in a circle. The music is a continuous sequence of notes and rests, with some measures containing triplets or other rhythmic patterns.

This is the gist of it. Steele constantly varies the details of the accompaniment so that the banjo effortlessly adapts itself to whatever liberties are taken with the meter of the song, sung in what had until recently been an unaccompanied style.

Notice that some measures have four beats and others two beats (expressed in eighth notes).

In the 15th and 17th measures we see the shift from a thumb to index lead and how the transition is made: there is a full beat, a pinch, providing enough time for the index to take over from the thumb. It almost never occurs in mountain banjo playing that the same finger sounds two short beats in a row. If the same finger must be used, either the note is held a whole beat, or it is followed by another short beat. Test the truth of this principle in down-picking and in two or three-finger picking.

Here is another way a note higher than the 1st position of the 2nd string may be played in this style: keep the thumb lead patterns and carry the melody right up the 2nd string as high

as need be. This is a smoother approach, very nice indeed, but lacking the syncopation and drive of Steele's or Holcomb's playing. B. F. Shelton, an old-time Victor recording artist, used this technique on *Darlin' Cora* (reissued on County 5051 and transcribed in Seeger's *How to Play the Five-String Banjo*), as well as on his version of *Pretty Polly*, where he treated the higher section of the melody like this:



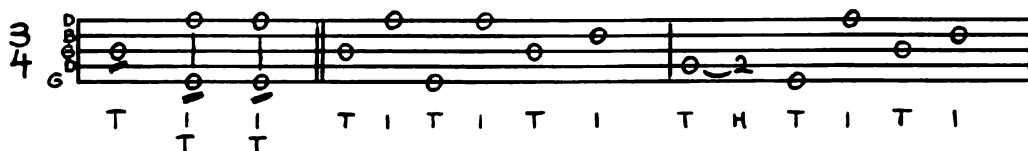
He might also have done this:



Either way produces some interesting melodic figures because the usual line up of pitches is changed.

THREE-FOUR TIME AND THE D TUNING

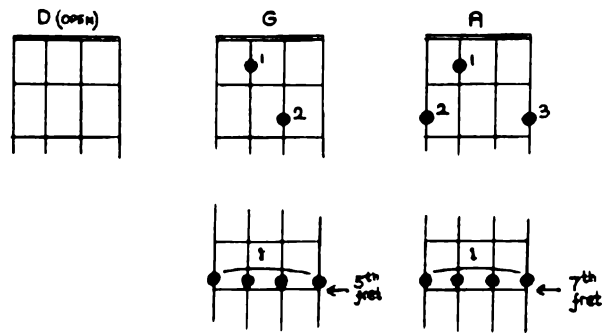
Triple rhythm is difficult to achieve on the 5-string banjo when one uses the traditional styles as a starting point. Many old-timers who can accomplish wondrous things in duple rhythms are reduced to dull scratching of chords to accompany songs in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. The two-finger index lead style does, however, lend itself quite well to this rhythm with adaptations of the basic patterns like these:



We can kill two birds with one stone by giving a song in $\frac{3}{4}$ time in this style and introducing the open D tuning.

D tuning: from the G tuning, lower the 2nd string a whole tone, to A.
lower the 3rd string a semi-tone to F#
lower the 5th string a semi-tone to F#

Chords in the open D tuning:



In the Pines is an old railroadman's lament that was known to mountain banjo pickers long before Bill Monroe brought it to a wider audience.



IN THE PINES

Moderately

In the pines, in the pines where the sun nev-er
 D D⁷ G
 T T | T | T H T | T | T sl T | T | T sl
 shines, I'll shiv-er when the cold wind blows.
 D A D
 T | T | T T | T | T H T | T sl T | T | T T | T

Little girl, little girl, what have I done,
That you turn your back on me?

I've killed no man, I've robbed no train.
I've done no hangin' crime.

It's a long steel rail and a short cross-tie;
I'm on my way back home.

You have probably discovered at this point that it is relatively easy to work out song accompaniments in the thumb lead two-finger style, picking out the melody along with the voice. It would be a good idea to get a good many songs down well before you try the next piece, a more demanding solo in the D tuning, Pete Steele's famous version of the *Coal Creek March*. Folklorist Ed Kahn and others have collected scores of other performances of this tune that grew out of the Coal Creek, Tennessee, Rebellion of the 1890s. Many versions include imitations of the drums and bugles of the militia that put down the Rebellion, but Steele's, which he claims was a funeral march improvised for the miners killed in the explosions that finally closed the mines some years after the Rebellion, is free of these effects. It is a remarkably compelling piece of music.

When Pete Steele was showing me how to play *The Coal Creek March*, he mentioned simply that "some parts are easy, some parts pretty hard." It flows smoothly from an index-finger lead double thumbing to a thumb lead. There are several passages where the thumb plays two notes in a row sliding from one to the other and creating a sound like old-time three-finger

picking (this effect is the exception that proves the "rule of thumb", that the same finger doesn't play two short beats in a row.) Listen to the original on the Library of Congress AAFS L2.

PART I

First staff of music for Part I. Chord: D. Fingerings: 3rd fing, 1st fing, 3rd fing, 1st fing. Rhythm: 1 1 | T T | T T | T T | 1 1 | T T | T T | T T |

Second staff of music for Part I. Chord: D. Rhythm: 1 1 | T T | T T | T T | 1 1 | T T | T T | T T |

Third staff of music for Part I. Chords: A, D, G. Rhythm: T T T | T T | T T T | T T | 1 1 | T T | T T | T T |

Fourth staff of music for Part I. Chords: G, D, A, D. Rhythm: 1 T | T | T T | T T T | T T | T T | T T | T T | T T | T T |

PART II

First staff of music for Part II. Chord: D. Rhythm: T T | T T | T T | T T | T T | T T | T T | T T |

Second staff of music for Part II. Chords: D, A, D. Rhythm: T T | T T | T T | T T | T T | T T | T T | T T |

Third staff of music for Part II. Chords: D, G, D. Rhythm: 1 1 | T T | T T | T T | T T | T T | T T | T T |

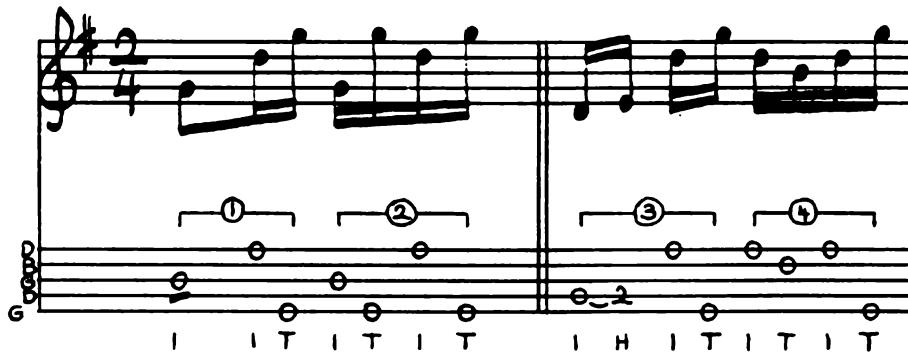
Fourth staff of music for Part II. Chord: A. Rhythm: T T T | T T | T T | T T | 1 1 | T T | T T | T T |

This is pretty much note for note what Steele does with perhaps a few variations and will require a lot of practice before you get a clean, fast, even progression of notes.

INDEX FINGER LEAD

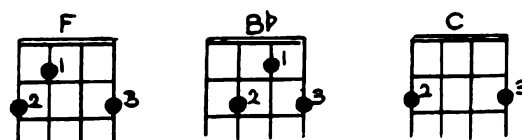
Many mountain musicians, particularly in the Western part of North Carolina, use a two-finger technique with a consistent index finger lead. It has a plunky, crisp sound that singers like Doc Watson, Bascom Lunsford, and Wade Mainer use to good advantage accompanying songs and ballads; but it can be made to sound hard and driving enough to work for dance tunes, particularly with other instruments.

In brief, this is the idea: with the right hand braced on the head, the *index* finger alternates between the inside strings and the first, while the thumb plays the off-beats on the 5th string, also at times coming down to the 2nd string for double thumbing.



The other devices of slides, hammers, and pulls are used pretty much as they are in up-picking.

Here is a fairly straightforward song, a mountain version of the Negro ballad *Frankie and Albert*. Banjo-picking singers have somewhere along the line wed this song to the F tuning (see *The Hills of Mexico*); in this case the thumb string (5th) is tuned *up* a whole tone to A (test by playing the 1st string at 7). Here are the chords you'll work from:



FRANKIE WAS A GOOD GIRL

Fran - kie was a good girl, ev - 'ry - bo - dy
 F
 I H I T T I P T T T I H I T I P I P

knows; spent one hun - dred dol - lars for
 F Bb
 I H I T T I T I sl T T T I P I P I I

Al - berts one suit of - clothes, he's her man,
 Bb F C
 I H I T T I P I I T H I I I T H I T

but - he done her - wrong.
 C F
 I H I T T I P I T T I I T I H I I I T I T

Frankie went down to the bar-room just for a bucket of beer;
She said to the fat bartender, "Has my lovin' man been here?
He's my man. He's doin' me wrong."

"Don't want to tell you no story, neither will I tell you no lie;
I saw your man 'bout an hour ago with a girl named Nellie Bly.
He's your man, but he's a-doin' you wrong."

Frankie looked over the transom, what do you think she did spy?
Saw her lovin' Albert, makin' love to Nellie Bly
He was her man. He was doin' her wrong.

Frankie reached under her kimono, pulled out a little forty-four,
Paloopidy-oo, three times she shoot, right through that hardwood floor.
She shot her man, 'cause he was doin' her wrong.

"Roll me over easy, roll me over slow,
Roll me over on my left side, 'cause my right side hurts me so.
I was your man, but I done you wrong."

Rubber tired buggy, rubber tired hack.
Took old Albert to the graveyard, and never did bring him back.
He was her man, and she shot him down.

Frankie went up in the stable, up in the big stable loft,
Tied a rope around her neck, and the damn fool jumped off,
As sure as you're born, old Frankie's gone.



Notice in the seventh measure how the index comes around the thumb to achieve a certain melodic figure in what one musician I know calls "a kind of durn criss-cross affair." The vocal line and the banjo match fairly well throughout, but both can be varied. Some players introduce more intricate ideas when the melody is being played alone as an introduction or a break between verses, then pare down the accompaniment to an outlining of the tune or chords. You should play what feels right to you.

This style greatly resembles up-picking but it affords the player a choice of crisp single notes on the secondary beats instead of obliging him to brush a chord. However it is easy to adapt this approach to include some chords when desired. With the hand still braced on the head, brush *up* on the first two or three strings with the index where a small chord is indicated on the second and fourth beats:

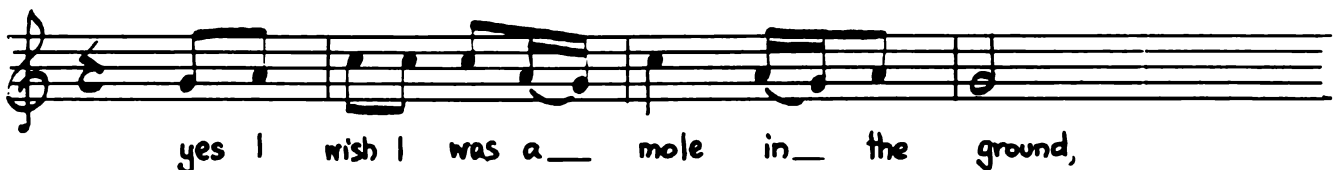
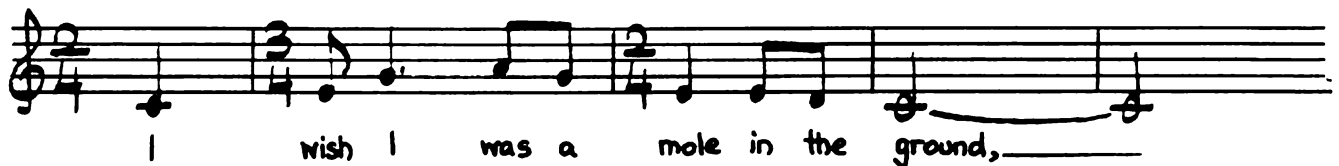


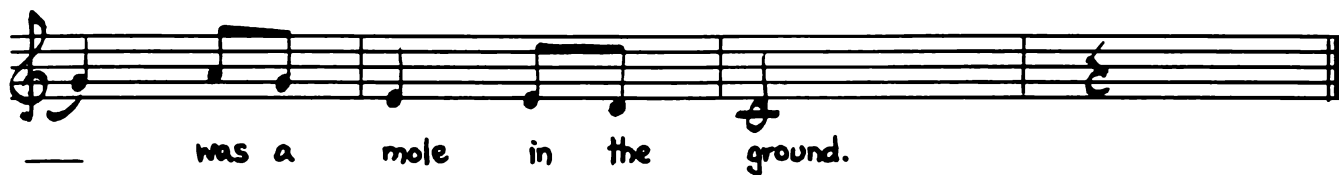
This is essentially the style of Bascom Lamar Lunsford, lawyer, folkmusic collector, promoter and performer of Leicester, North Carolina. Try a song from his vast repertoire, some wild verses from the Pigeon River Valley which, says Lunsford, "are born out of the hilarity of mountain banjo picking." Listen to his recording of it on the Folkways Anthology, Vol. III or Folkways FP 40.

MOLE IN THE GROUND

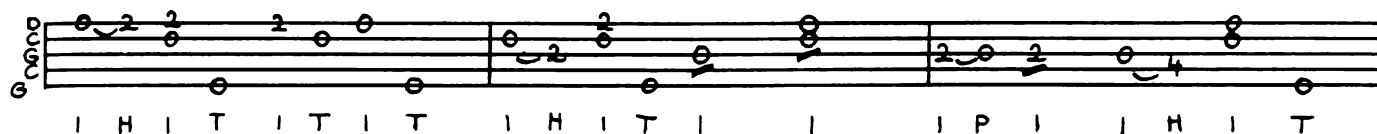


VOCAL LINE





BREAK BETWEEN VERSES



Well, Kimpy wants a nine dollar shawl;
Yes, Kimpy wants a nine dollar shawl.
When I come o'er the hill with a forty dollar bill,
'Tis, baby, where you been so long?

Oh, I don't like a railroad man,
No, I don't like a railroad man.
A railroad man will kill you when he can,
And drink up your blood like wine.

Baby, where you been so long?
Yes, where have you been so long?
I been in the Bend with rough and rowdy men,
'Tis, baby, where you been so long?

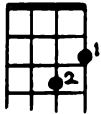
I wish I was a lizard in the spring;
Yes, I wish I was a lizard in the spring.
'f I's a lizard in the spring, I'd hear my darling sing,
And I wish I was a lizard in the spring.

Well, Kimpy, let your hair roll down;
Yes, Kimpy let your hair roll down.
Let your hair roll down and your bangs curl around,
And Kimpy, let your hair roll down.

The melody Lunsford sings is very free and irregular rhythmically and the banjo usually just plunks along in the basic pattern without much attempt to follow the tune; an occasional hammered or pulled note in the holes adds some interest. In the accompaniment as well as the break Lunsford often omits the off-beat thumbed fifth string. This austerity gives the rippling sequence more punch when he does let all the notes roll back in.

Another variation of index lead two-finger picking brings it nearly full circle to the basic up-picking: the index picks up on the lead notes, then brushes *down* over the first two or three strings. This could be classed with up-picking, of course, but the *hand is not in motion*, still being braced on the head, and the sound is significantly different from what we did in the last chapter.

This style of picking as well as an unusual variant of the C tuning seem to have been associated in the Kentucky mountains with the lyric song *Little Birdie*. The tuning is naturally enough called the "Little Birdie tuning"--Pete Steele is adamant in his claim that no other song can be set to it, nor can *Little Birdie* ever properly be played in another tuning; and he is probably right. From the standard C tuning, drop the 2nd string to A, giving you this C chord--



providing just the right hammers and pulls to carry the melody along. In addition, the thumb string is tuned down to E.

The voice line and banjo accompaniment are a composite of several versions I've heard; the break is taken from Pete Steele's playing.



LITTLE BIRDIE

Lit-He bir-die, pret-ty bir-die
 Got a short time to stay here

come and sing me your song.
 and a long time to be gone.

BREAK
 Little birdie, little birdie, what makes you fly so high?
 You must have another true love, way up in the blue sky.
 If I was a little birdie, I'd not build my nest in the air:
 I'd build my nest in my true love's breast
 And roost in the locks of her hair.

Remember that all the little chords are brushed down with the index. Note that the third and sixth bars of the break have three main stresses instead of two. This crops up frequently in Steele's playing (see the *Coal Creek March* and *Heavy Loaded Freight Train* in this book) and you should take it in stride.

Notice that in the fourth and fifth measures of the break, the thumb hits the 4th string instead of the 5th as a drone. It is little touches like this that give traditional banjo picking much of its subtlety and interest.

III. More Down-Picking

CLAWHAMMER, DROP THUMB, FRAILING

There is a great family of down-picking styles in the South known variously as knocking, knock-down, drop-thumb, beating, rapping, clawhammer, flyin' hand, frammings, or frailing. These are local names and do not necessarily refer to stylistic differences, although these differences exist a-plenty. The same basic approach to sounding a banjo--striking downward--can from player to player and from region to region produce a wide range of sounds. It can give a song a simple rippling accompaniment or an intricate one, weaving complex figures among or between phrases sung by the voice; it can create driving mountain dance music either alone or with the fiddle and other instruments. It can be highly percussive in character, although in certain areas talented musicians have created styles in which the banjo rivals the fiddle in ability to carry a melodic line.

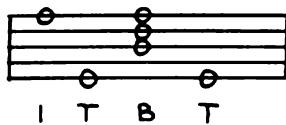
I'll assume that you have acquired the rudiments of down-picking in the first chapter of this book or elsewhere. In either case glance back over that section before you proceed, because the hints I have given on hand position and attack will make the material in the present chapter much easier to learn. That material is simply an exploration of some of the different sounds made possibly by down-picking with some examples pointing up regional differences or illustrating the styles of some of the old-time pickers whose music has become known through recordings

RHYTHM DROP-THUMB

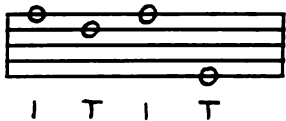
Once your right hand can effortlessly knock out a clean down-picking rhythm and incorporate hammers, pulls, and slides into the pattern to carry a melody, you can add the next ingredient, the *drop-thumb*, which is the equivalent of *double thumbing* in the up-picking style. Do you recall how the thumb followed *every* strong beat in the first stage of *Hook and Line*? In that example the thumb stayed on the 5th string. Then we eliminated it after the first beat to make this basic pattern:

But the thumb trails along with the hand as it comes down, so it can just as easily do this again:





Or, instead of hitting the 5th string on the first off-beat, it can drop down to the 2nd string:



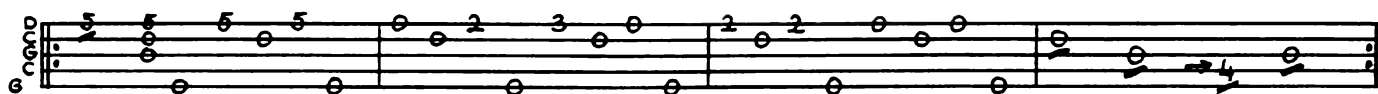
The brush is eliminated in favor of another index note on the 1st string, but this should present no problem.

Just remember that the thumb drops to rest on the second string *at the same instant* that the first note is sounded, not even a split second after. Then the thumb flexes and sounds the 2nd string as the hand bounces up into position to descend again. Then the hand comes down, the index striking the 1st string as the thumb comes to rest on the 5th string. Finally the 5th string is sounded. Once you have mastered this simple sequence you will be able to vary the order of the strings in ways which will be explained later. But first, try a tune in the old-time breakdown or square dance style that uses a lot of this rhythm drop-thumb. That is, the thumb alternates between the 5th and the second string for rhythmic purposes as the index lead carries the melody.



BLACK-EYED SUSIE

PART I



Susie, keep them hoe-cakes a-bakin', sold my fiddle to buy some bacon.
Ducks in the mill-pond, geese in the clover, tell them pretty girls I'm comin' over!

PART II



Hey pretty little black-eyed Susie, hey pretty little black-eyed Susie (2)

**All I want in this creation,
Pretty little wife and a big plantation.**

PART II:

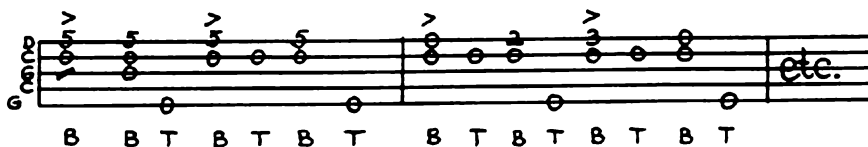
Hey, pretty little black-eyed Susie, (2x)
Hey, pretty little black-eyed Susie, hey!

**All I need to make me happy,
Two little boys to call me Pappy—
One named Sop; one named Davy;
One loves meat and the other loves gravy.**

Susie and the boys went huckleberry pickin',
The boys got drunk and Susie got a lickin'.

This is not the most intricate or subtle sort of banjo piece but it has a good solid rhythm and could be continued for a half an hour or so while the dancers go through the figures of a running set. It follows, incidentally, the two-part form of most British and American fiddle tunes.

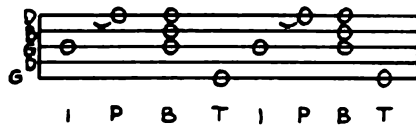
I have heard some old timers play who didn't consider it wrong to hit more than one string on the main accents, creating this kind of full sound:





THE IPIT AND THE MELODIC DROP-THUMB (BRUSHLESS FRAILING)

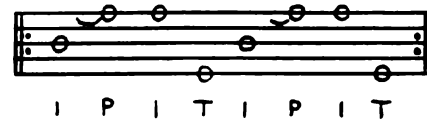
There are two more important techniques that should be mastered before you go any further, lest you get the notion that they are exceptional occurrences in mountain banjo picking to be attempted only at an advanced stage. In reality these two devices, which we will call the IPIT and the melodic drop-thumb, are essential to anything but the most rudimentary down-picking, and are known to most of the good old-time musicians who play in that style, although the ways they put them to use vary considerably.

The sequence of index-pull-index-thumb looks like the word IPIT under a line at tablature and is certainly not an expression in folk usage. It is a development of this idea--



--where the lead notes are followed by a pull, usually on the first string. This gives the music a greater smoothness, , instead of .

Now carry the idea a step further and try substituting a single note on the first string struck by the index for the brushed chords:



This is the whole IPIT idea. Here are some points to remember as you practice it:

- 1 - The notes played by the index are struck with the same sort of attack you are accustomed to using in down-picking. If the hand is held correctly it will be a simple matter to come down on the 1st string alone rather than brushing more than one string.

Practice this--



--until the index is used to hopping across the 2nd string without touching it and getting a clear sound on the 1st. Also, remember to bring the thumb to rest on the 5th string as the 2nd and 4th beats are hit in preparation for sounding the thumb string.

- 2 - In this example you will probably produce the pulled notes by plucking at the 2nd fret of the 1st string with the left 2nd finger. Synchronize bringing this finger to the string with the 1st and 3rd beats, touching the 1st string *just* as the index plays the lead note. *Do not hammer or even fret the string to be pulled.* In this case you'd produce an E if you make this mistake, a note quite out of keeping with the effect you're trying for, which is this:



You see that half the notes in the measure are the same fifth, the D, creating a rippling drone effect. The IPIT idea is really the setting up of a 1st string drone in down-picking while the lead notes are played on the inside strings.

Some musicians use this device intermittently, mixing it with various sorts of figures, while others make it the basis of their style, at least in certain pieces. Both Buell Kazee of Kentucky and Clarence Ashley of Tennessee use it to accompany ballads. Ashley tends to set up a constant pattern without much melody in unison with his voice, punctuating his singing with short banjo figures between phrases or verses. Kazee often plays the melody on the inside strings, keeping the IPIT effect going as he sings. Here is roughly the way he sings and accompanies his version of the broadside ballad, *The Butcher's Boy*.

THE BUTCHER'S BOY

Moderately

She went up - stairs to

MOUNTAIN MINOR

2 → 3

I sl I T I P I T I P I T I I T I P I T I P I T I sl I T

make her bed, and

I P I T I P I T I P I T I P I T I P I T I sl I T

not one word to her

I P I T I P I T I sl I T I sl I T I H I T



Her mother she went upstairs too,
Sayin', "Daughter, oh daughter, what troubles you?"

"Oh mother, oh mother, I cannot tell,
Of that railroad boy I love so well.

"There is a place in London town,
Where that railroad boy goes and sits down.

"He takes some strange girl on his knee,
And he tells to her what he won't tell me."

Her father he came home from work,
Sayin', "Where is daughter, she seemed so hurt?"

He went upstairs to give her hope,
And found her hanging by a rope.

He took his knife and cut her down,
And on her bosom these words he found:

"Go dig my grave both wide and deep.
Place a marble stone at my head and feet.

"And over my coffin place a snow white dove,
To prove to the world I died for love."

Listen to the original performance reissued on the Folkways Anthology, Vol. I. Note that the pulled notes on the 1st string are to be played with the left 3rd finger at the third fret. The pulling action should be so automatic that you can concentrate with ease on the fingering of the melody notes. The index will take those at the 2nd fret and the middle those at the 3rd. Notice too that some of the measures are in $\frac{3}{4}$ time and there are simply three IPIT sequences instead of two. Kazee's *Wagoners Lad*, also on the Folkways Anthology, is entirely in $\frac{3}{4}$ time and he uses this treatment throughout. Try it with any slow $\frac{3}{4}$ time songs you know.

Now we can turn to the melodic use of the drop-thumb idea. Most of the folk banjo styles tend to be more rhythmic than melodic. When the beginning player wishes to introduce some melody into his playing, he does best to choose tunes that make their melodic points on the

principal accents, i.e. *Hook and Line, Free Little Bird*: . However, many

melodies that Appalachian banjo pickers might wish to play are not that square, be they vocal

melodies or fiddle tunes. The melodies often look like this . We've seen

that such figures can be played using hammers and pulls in many cases. But the drop-thumb technique can be put to use in carrying melody quite separately from its other function of providing a rhythmic countermovement on the inside strings. There are two ways this can work. For an example of the first way try the first bar of *Cripple Creek*.



Translated into music, it is:

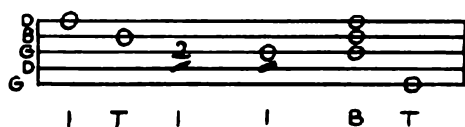
Pretty typical stuff, but notice that every note here is part of the melody, just as a fiddle might play it.



You should try to play all the notes with equal clarity and loudness so that the figure will come across as melody. Banjo pickers like the great Uncle Dave Macon, who use the drop thumb mainly for rhythmic effect, often play the thumbed inside strings rather quietly in contrast with a strong attack on the lead notes. (Listen to Uncle Dave's *Cumberland Mountain Deer Race*, reissued on RFB 51, for a good example of how varying dynamics produced his famous exciting rhythm. Also, look ahead to the down-picking passages in *Old Plank Road*, Chapter VI of this book.)

But when the drop-thumb is used to carry a distinctly melodic idea, you must make every note count equally.

The most common sort of melodic drop-thumb is not the full sequence, but an interrupted sequence like this—

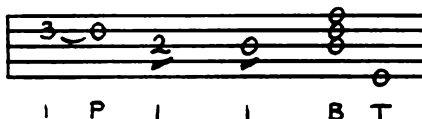


—where the thumb dropped to an inside string to play a melody note is followed by a lead note struck by the index. Do not forget to bring the thumb to rest on the 2nd string as the 1st string is hit. Then, of course, the hand bounces up as the 2nd string is played.

These same notes



could also be obtained by a pull—



—but the drop thumb is crisper, less percussive; and in other cases pulls and hammers will not always get you your desired notes. It is good to know both approaches.



Here is the well-known banjo and fiddle tune, *Cluck Old Hen*, notated with a good deal of melodic drop-thumb, as it is usually played.

CLUCK, OLD HEN

PART I
VOCAL LINE

My old hen's a good old hen, she lays eggs for the rail-road men.

PART II

My old hen's a good old hen,
She lays eggs for the section men;
Sometimes one, sometimes two,
Sometimes enough for the whole damn crew.

First time she cackled she cackled in the lot,
Next time she cackled, she cackled in the pot.

Old hen, old hen, where your chickens gone?
Down in the new ground peckin' up corn.

Cluck old hen, cluck and squall,
She ain't laid an egg since away last fall.

Cluck, Old Hen is one of tunes best suited for the classic old-time fiddle and banjo duet combination, which furnished the music for mountain dances before the turn of the century when the guitar and other instruments began to make their appearance. The banjo not only added rhythmic punctuation to the tunes, but shared the melody with the fiddle. As exciting as this music is to listen or dance to, it is even more exhilarating to play—the two musicians constantly feed each other ideas of rhythmic emphasis or melodic variation; when they have built up a good rapport, their music has a quality seldom achieved in solo playing. If you have a friend who plays the fiddle, try some tunes like *Cluck Old Hen*, *Cripple Creek*, *Sally Goodin*, and *John Henry* together. Your playing will gain immeasurably in verve and savvy and you will be recreating the great sound that was the very core of the mountain string band style.

The sounds that Southern musicians produce on their instruments often have a direct and specific relationship to either the human voice or the various non-musical noises they hear around them. "He can make a banjer talk" is a comment on a player's ability to echo or imitate the words he sings as well as being a general indication of approbation. A tune like *Cluck, Old Hen* is a successful attempt to mock the sound of a barnyard animal. The train,

The fiddle-banjo combination can excel in making this train music (see J. P. Nestor's *Train on the Island* on the Folkways Anthology, Vol. III for one good example) but the banjo can do very well alone. Pete Steele plays a piece called *Heavy-Loaded Freight Train Pullin' a Crooked Hill*. He explains that in "East Bernstadt, Kentucky, used to be boys put soap on the track, to cause the engineer to slip the driver wheel." The unconventional accelerandos and retards make this tune impossible to dance to, putting it in the "just for entertainment" category that mountain musicians reserve for music intended neither for dancing nor song accompaniment.

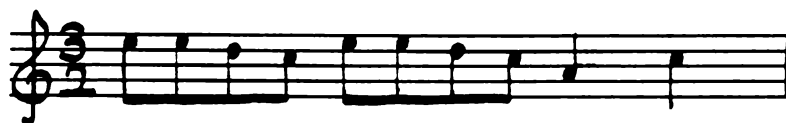
From the 2C tuning, lower the thumb string to E (match with 1 at the 2nd fret). There are three parts to this piece. Part I might be called "ad lib train music." Listen to Steele's Library of Congress recording for an idea of how this is played. Part II, written out below, is the engine trying to make it up the hill, and Part III is the down-picking section, with the train balling along on the downgrade.

[illegible]

This tune is great fun, especially when some kids are listening. Notice the unorthodox picking in Part II—a downward brush followed by the fifth string, then the 1st string picked up.

and finally a pinch of the 1st and 5th strings. The rhythm is this 

Notice that the drop-thumb in Part III is the opposite of the normal order, hitting the thumb string first and the inside string second, producing this sound:



If you develop facility at changing the order of thumbed notes, many more melodic possibilities will open up to you.

A TUNE PLAYED BY WADE WARD

Wade Ward of Independence, Virginia is one of the most sensitive and gifted of the clawhammer banjo pickers of the Blue Ridge. Alan Lomax, who first recorded him for the Library of Congress Archives in the 1930's still considers him his "favorite five-string banjo player." Ward's playing is remarkably clean and his versions of well-known or rare tunes have a way of sticking in one's memory. Here is his *Chilly Winds*, a first cousin of *Going Down the Road Feelin' Bad*, which he learned on a boyhood visit into Tennessee. He says that the noting high on the neck is more typical of Tennessee than of his own region.

CHILLY WINDS

(G tuning) Fast, incisive



The notation consists of three systems of five-line staves. The first system is in G tuning and includes fret numbers (12, 14) and picking notation (I, T, T, T, S, T). The second system includes fret numbers (5, 7) and picking notation (I, T, P, T, T, T, T, T, P, T, P, T, P, T). The third system includes fret numbers (7, 5) and picking notation (I, T, T, T, T, T, T, P, T, P, T, P, T).

The index finger of the left hand takes care of the barres and slides, and the third finger plays the notes two frets higher than the barre position.

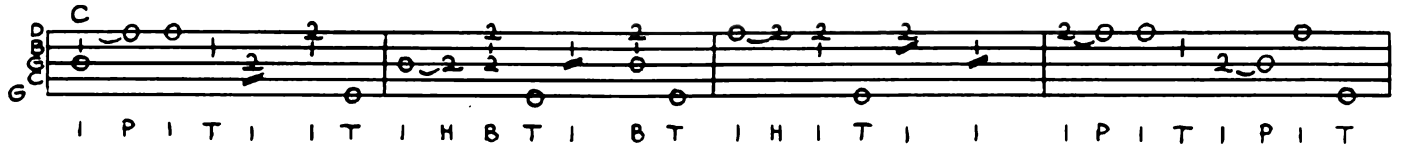
HOBART SMITH

Another exceptional figure among the old-time banjo players was Hobart Smith of Saltville, Virginia. He called his style "rapping" and combined a percussive syncopation with a strong melodic content. To work a lot of melodic detail into a tune like *The Arkansas Traveler* he would use thumbed notes and hammers and pulls in a very irregular fashion.

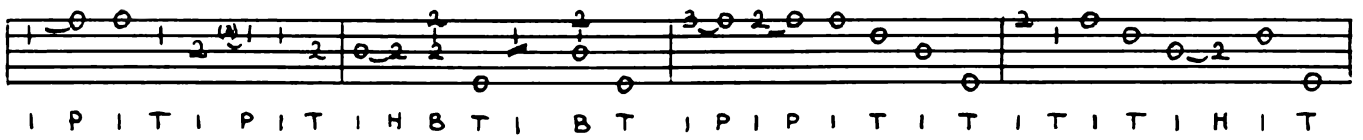
THE ARKANSAS TRAVELER

PART I

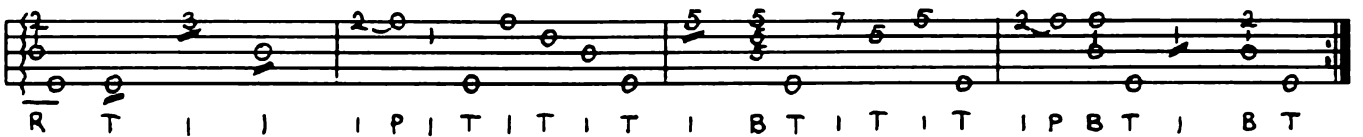
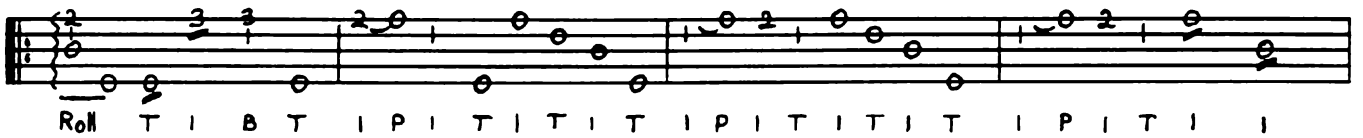
Standard C - Fast



PART I - VARIATION



PART II



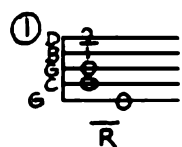
ALTERNATE PART II



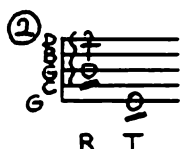


This tune was taken from the Disc 78 album that Hobart Smith made with his sister, singer Texas Gladden, in the 1940's. See Folk Legacy FS 17 for some of Smith's finest late recordings, which include, in addition to vocals and guitar and fiddle playing, ten banjo pieces. There is a tablature transcription by Fleming Brown of a rare and lovely tune, *Last Chance*.

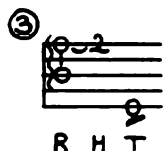
In *Arkansas Traveler*, notice the rolls (R). This device is encountered frequently in mountain banjo music and provides a refreshing break in the persistent down-picking rhythms and can also help carry the melody. Here are three of the most common forms of roll:



In the space of one beat the back of the hand rakes down over the strings, the thumb hitting the 5th string at the end.



Here the thumb plays the 5th string as a melody note on a separate beat.



This is a variation of the above idea which includes a hammer in the roll.

VARIATION AND IMPROVISATION

Many of the tunes in this book are as close to note for note transcriptions of actual performances as I could make. The student should have no qualms about learning by following a good model closely; traditional musicians, too, often try to "get it down just like" an admired player picks a particular tune. This is not slavish imitation for its own sake but rather a passionate desire to get at the very sinews of the style, based on the realization that the impact of traditional music depends on detail and an evocative context, i.e. a particularly moving performance.

Of course the student is aware of the fact that folk musicians, like Rufus Crisp or Paul Joines or Buell Kazee or Clarence Ashley or Samantha Bumgarner, have or had a personal expressive quality or sound based on technical factors like certain preferred tunings, licks, figures, general touch and attack, choice of repertoire, and on each individual personality: the student is naturally desirous of making his own statement with the music rather than crawling into someone else's artistic skin. This is fine as long as one appreciates the fact that folk styles tend to be conservative and one doesn't have to move the earth in order to express oneself *within* a tradition. A little personal innovation goes a long way in this music and one needn't go overboard in the direction of technical virtuosity, self-consciously weird harmonic effects, or jazz-inspired no-holds-barred improvisations on the theme to add something of oneself to traditional banjo playing.

But what role do variation and improvisation play in mountain banjo music and how is the student to put them to use? It is important to understand that the first banjo player to try

his hand at *The Soldier's Joy* had the fiddle tune in his head and improvised his way through the melody and rhythm by experimentation with the various techniques at his command. And at each succeeding go-round this man and his musical heirs varied the treatment to suit themselves and their listeners, preserving what they found satisfying. A similar process was followed for setting the old unaccompanied ballads to banjo. A lot of listening will give you a sense of how much variation goes on during a given performance and a sense of what kind of variation fits with the style. Of course some players do quite a lot, while others are content to play the tune pretty similarly each time.

To give you an idea of what can be done with a simple tune try these variations on *Old Ruben*. It is a *potpourri* taken from the playing of Wade Ward, Riley Shelton, Cass Moore, Pete Steele, and Vester Jones and has much more than any one player would put into a performance—but it is all good banjo stuff.

OLD RUBEN



You can count the days— I'm gone, you can tell the train— I'm



on, you can hear my whis- tie blow a hun- dred miles.

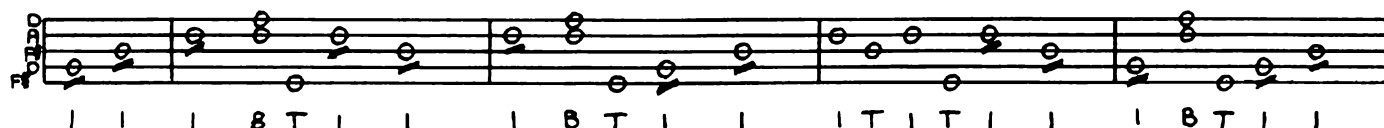
Down in seaport city, was a sportin' little town,
The dudes all a-standin' around.
Well, the chief of police and the captain too,
Drove them dudes right out of town.

Been to the east, been to the west,
Goin' where those chilly winds don't blow.

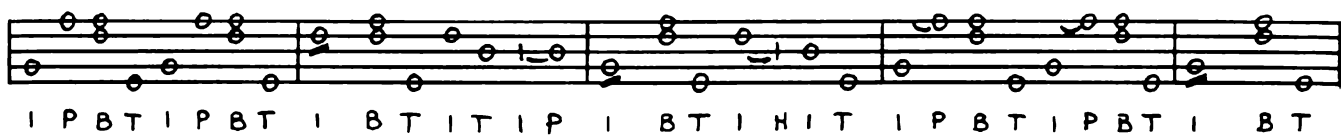
Old Ruben, oh, Ru—, Ruben, oh, Ru—,
Well, it's Ruben, where you been so long?

If the train runs me right, be home tomorrow night,
I'm five hundred miles from my home.

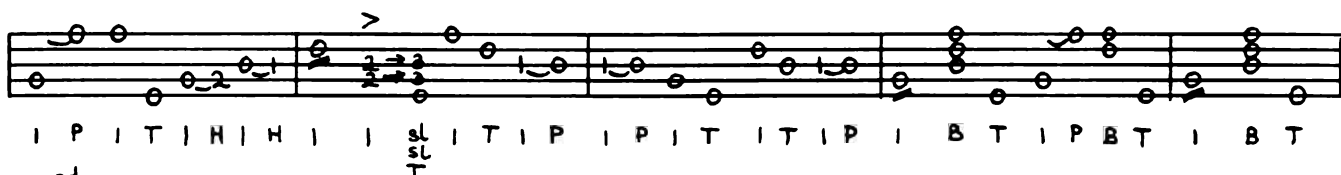
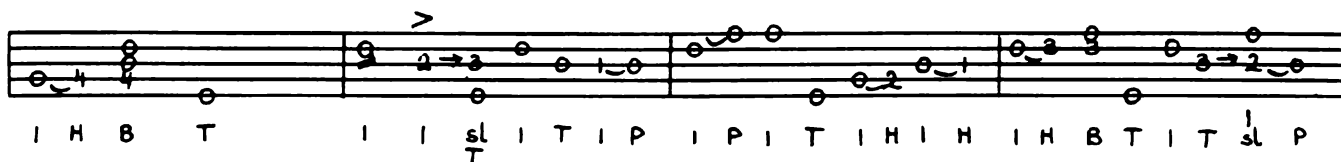
A rudimentary banjo melody could be played in the D tuning without the use of the left hand, illustrating the principle that tunings often include many of the melody notes of a given piece (granted this is stretching things a bit).



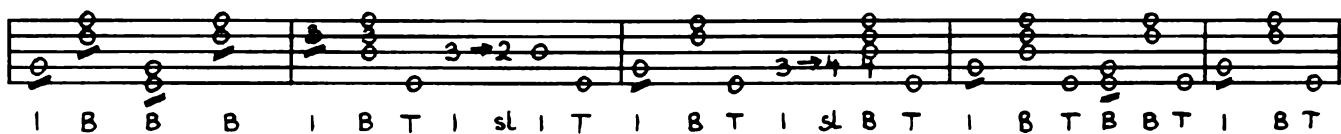
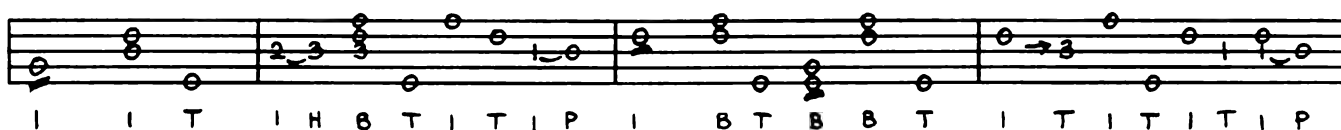
1st VARIATION



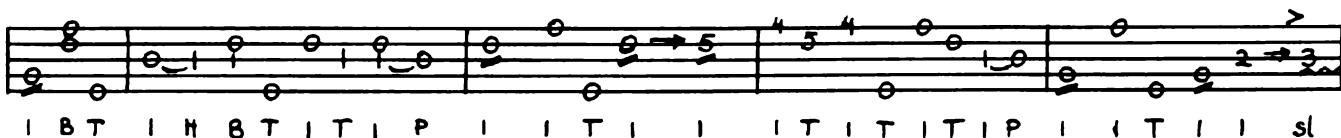
2nd VARIATION



3rd VARIATION



4th VARIATION



sustain note

BRIDGE



These are a few of the many possibilities, keeping close to the sparse melody. Note that at times the thumb hits the 5th string as a slide is completed. In the 3rd variation there are ringing brushes of the 5th and 4th strings instead of an index finger lead. (Pete Steele showed me this.) Throughout, the drop-thumb occurs on inside strings, combined with slides and pulls. Notice in the 4th variation that the last note in the 5th measure is accented and then held down through the following measure, which accentuates the syncopation.

You'll see how to vary the rhythmic emphasis to achieve syncopation while working your way through these variations and similar ones you may devise. It is a good idea to keep your touch fairly light and precise. You'll see how the banjo slides can approximate rising and descending attacks of the voice or fiddle.

It goes without saying that these licks should be applied to other tunes.

TUNINGS AND THE CAPO

We have been taking the various tunings pretty much as they come in this book, which is what a traditional banjo player would do over the years, learning the most common ones first and then picking up or inventing more unusual ones as he hears them or as the need arises. Most old-timers know at least four or five tunings and some use as many as eighteen. These tunings are one of the great achievements of the anonymous musicians who developed the folk styles of banjo picking. Each tuning has its own area of technical and expressive usefulness based on the kinds of melodies or chords it makes possible and on its sound, or the feeling it communicates. The several C tunings have an ebullient quality reflected in the rousing dance tunes for which they are most often used; some of the minor modal tunings used for old songs and ballads could only be described as haunting and mysterious. This is not just subjective projection by us city fanciers of old-time banjo music. The old timers themselves have great respect for the power of the tunings to evoke moods. Central Kentucky banjo pickers call the D tuning the "graveyard tuning", not only because the tune *Graveyard* is set to it but in recognition of the mournful sound of the tuning when used in a modal way (of course the song may have been suggested by the tuning in the first place.)

The salient purpose of the tunings, then, is to permit certain musical sounds and configurations. They are not used mainly for reasons of pitch or key change. A player would seldom choose one tuning over another because he wanted to sing in a higher or lower key, although he would more often forsake a preferred tuning in order to play along in the same key as another instrument. A very important point to remember is this: the tunings really refer to the relationship of the strings, not to absolute pitch. Folk musicians often tune their banjos as much as a whole tone higher or lower than standard pitch in order to sing more comfortably or to be "in gear" with another instrument. It is common for a banjo picker to set the strings of a G or 2C tuning a whole tone higher than normal to enable him to join a fiddle playing in its accustomed keys of A and D respectively (the banjo tunings would now be ^AEAC#E and ^ADADE.) All the indications of tunings in this book refer, then, to a range of possible pitches that could be varied by tuning all the strings up or down, or by using the capo.

The capo, as most city folk musicians know, is a little bar which, either by spring or screw or elastic, can be clamped over the neck of a guitar or banjo at any fret, thus raising the pitch of the strings. (A capo at the first fret in the G tuning would make the open chord A^b, at the second fret A, etc.) Of course the fifth string is not affected by the capo for the first five frets (you will seldom want to move the capo higher, anyway); so the thumb string must be tuned up to the desired pitch. It cannot normally stand a pitch higher than A without breaking, so

many people either invest in one of the special sliding 5th string capos available, or they put a tiny screw or (as Pete Seeger suggests) an HO gauge model railroad spike under the 5th string at the 9th fret, so that the string can be slipped under it, being fretted to a higher pitch that can be loosened as required.

Capos were unknown to traditional banjo pickers in the old days and are still very seldom used by them; however, there is no reason why you should not enjoy the convenience they afford. Tightening all the strings takes a lot longer and also changes the tension, and consequently the feel of the strings to your fingers, which may be annoying; and you may want to set your banjo higher than one tone above normal. The use of the capo is perfectly compatible with the traditional tunings.

Let us now turn to a blues ballad in a variant of the D tuning that I have adapted from a version played and sung by Kentuckian, Hobart Bailey, collected by Stuart Jamieson, Ethel Raim, and Hedy West. *Little Sadie* is presumed to be of Negro origin and is known all over the South. It works particularly well as a banjo ballad—the best-known recordings are by Clarence Ashley on Columbia 15522D and his re-recording on Folkways FA2359. Bailey's version is quite different. Here is the tuning: from the G tuning, lower the 2nd string to A and the 5th to D (unison with the 1st). (This tuning has many possible variations: if you keep the thumb string at G you can get some interesting effects in the key of G, utilizing the open 2nd string, pulling down from or hammering up to the 2nd fret. Try *Willie Moore* this way.)



In *Little Sadie*, pay close attention to the way the banjo figures echo the vocal phrases and to the way the two are intertwined. Note that the thumbed 5th string provides many of the D notes in the melody. Down-pick with fairly small hand movements and a good deal of control. Not too fast.

LITTLE SADIE

The musical score for "Little Sadie" is presented in four systems, each with a vocal line (treble clef, 2/4 time) and a banjo line (treble clef, 2/4 time). The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

System 1: The vocal line begins with a whole rest, followed by the lyrics "I. Went out last". The banjo line consists of eighth notes with fingerings: I T I T I I I T I H I T.

System 2: The vocal line continues with "night" (under a slur) and "a - mak-in' my". The banjo line continues with fingerings: I T I T I I T I H I T I T I sl.

System 3: The vocal line has "rounds," and "went". The banjo line continues with fingerings: I H I T I T I P I T I sl I I T.

System 4: The vocal line has "out last night" (under a slur) and "a -". The banjo line continues with fingerings: I H I T I I T I I I T.

mak-in' my rounds, I met lit-tle Sa-die and I

blowed her down.

TAG

2. 1

The musical score consists of three systems. Each system has a melody line on a treble clef staff and a guitar accompaniment line on a six-string staff. The lyrics are written below the melody line. Fingerings (1, 2, 3) and other markings (P, H, sl) are indicated below the guitar line. The first system covers the lyrics 'mak-in' my rounds, I met lit-tle Sa-die and I'. The second system covers 'blowed her down.' and includes a 'TAG' marking. The third system includes a double bar line and the marking '2. 1'.

I went back home and I went to bed, (2)
A forty-four smoker all under my head.

Woke up next morning 'bout half past nine, (2)
The guns all roarin' down the line.

Well, I begin thinkin' what a deed I done, (2)
I grabbed my hat and away I run.

Made a pretty good run, but a little too slow, (2)
The Sheriff overtook me down in Baltimo'.

I was standin' on the corner, a-readin' the bill, (2)
When up stepped the sheriff from Louisville.

"Young man, young man, is your name Brown? (2)
I believe you're the man that shot Sadie down."

"No sir, no sir, my name is Robert E. Lee, (2)
If you have any papers please don't read 'em to me."

Got up next mornin', put on my boots; (2)
They took me down to Frankfort for to wear the
striped suit.

For good measure I'll end this chapter with a fiddle tune that I have worked out in down-picking banjo, *There was an Old Soldier and he Had a Wooden Leg*, an American form of the Irish hornpipe, *The Red-Haired Boy*. It is a little tricky, so study the tablature closely.

THERE WAS AN OLD SOLDIER AND HE HAD A WOODEN LEG

PART I



PART II




IV. The Fretless Banjo

The earliest 5-string banjos had no frets on the neck and it was on such instruments that Negro and white musicians of the 19th century developed the antecedents of most of the folk styles that have come down to us. Fretless banjos are still played in the mountains of the South. Some musicians tend to associate them with home-made or crude instruments used or learnt on before the day of “brought-on”, or factory-made banjos that came in with the mail order boom and the railroads. But other old-timers, particularly in Virginia, have continued to prefer the smooth fingerboard and the special sounds it can produce. Sometimes they will even file down the frets of a standard banjo, although musician-craftsmen like Kyle Creed and the late Frank Proffitt have made fretless banjos to satisfy a demand in their own communities as well as elsewhere. And John Cohen has met a musician who resurfaced his fingerboard with formica as snazzy as that on any Howard Johnson counter top.

These folk musicians, then, do not play the fretless banjo for any precious antiquarian reasons; they do, however, appreciate its old-timey sound. What characterizes this sound? There are two main features: first the absence of frets permits the utilization of all the intermediate quarter and eighth and sixteenth tones through smooth slurs and slides up and down the fingerboard.

Instead of this  you can play this  doing an ordinary slide. These

liquid smooth slides are a dead give-away that you are listening to a fretless banjo. The second quality is a more muted, less ringing tone. This varies from instrument to instrument, but generally holds true. The reason is that the strings are vibrating from the bridge to the soft flesh of the fingers stopping them rather than to a metal fret. Fretless banjos usually have a sustained resonance that permits the sound of a full chord to continue under following single notes (some players like Glenn Smith turn this into an almost contrapuntal effect.) This special sound gives a lovely subtlety to even the spirited dance tunes, and can accompany perfectly a soft voice like Frank Proffitt's.

How does the technique of playing a fretless banjo differ from the styles we've considered? In general they are very similar. Players use up- and down-picking and the various two-finger styles. They seldom go above the 5th string peg position as notes get hard to find up there. Many players tend to hit the strings near where the neck joins the head rather than over the head itself. Most aim for accuracy of intonation in single notes or at the ends of slides, although some intentionally slide slightly sharp of the note they hit. (A few deliberately utilize dissonances otherwise impossible—see Glenn Smith's *Old Jimmy Sutton* on Folkways FS 3811.)

Let us try two examples of fretless banjo picking. For reasons of convenience they will be noted in tablature in the usual way—consider the fret numbers to indicate position on the neck, which you should know pretty much by touch by now. Certainly you can try these pieces on the regular banjo, too. If you are lucky enough to have a fretless instrument, supplement this chapter with much listening to the records of fretless banjo music that are available, and ease your picking into the special flavor of the instrument.

First try a very simple song in up-picking that can be heard on *Frank Proffitt*, Folkways FA 23608.



BABY-O

VOCAL LINE (Banjo ad lib)



1. What are ye gon-na do with the ba-by-o? What are ye gon-na do with the



ba-by-o? Wrap him up in ca-li-co,

CHORUS



send him back to his mam-my-o! That's what I'll do with the



ba-by-o, that's what I'll do with the ba-by-o!

Similarly:

mammy-o? Give her a needle and thread to sew.

laddie-o? Put him on a horse and watch him go.

lassie-o? Marry her off to a handsome beau.

daddy-o? Kick him out in the rain and snow.

BANJO BREAK (UP-PICKING)



I B T I B T I I I B T I B T I B T I B T I B T



I P B T I P B T I I I B T I B T I B T I P B T I B T

PRETTY LITTLE MISS

Handwritten musical notation for the guitar solo in 'The Highway Blues'. The notation is on a single staff with a G-clef. It includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and fingerings (1-5). The solo is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. The notation is written in a style that is easy to read and play, with some annotations like 'R' for a rest and 'sustain' at the end.

[illegible]

The first system of musical notation for 'The Bird Song' is written on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of the following notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (half). The lyrics 'The Bird Song' are written below the staff, aligned with the notes: 'The' under G4, 'Bird' under A4, 'Song' under B4, and 'The Bird Song' under the final G4. The system ends with a double bar line.

PART IV

1.

1. 2. 3. 2. 1.

2. PART V

T T T T T T T H B T T P T P T P T P

A whole book could be written on the fretless banjo and the lovely tunes played on it. Listen to some of the records mentioned in the Selected Discography and, if you have a fretless instrument, try some of the tunes. If you don't have one, it is not as difficult as you might think to find one, because the old ones tend to stay on the walls of pawn shops and second-hand instrument stores longer than the fretted variety because there is little demand and people don't know what to do with them. I saw one displayed in a New York shop under a lettered card reading CHALLENGE!: the dealer was no doubt stretching his salesmanship to the limit. Several years ago I bought a beautiful antique fretless banjo in New York for very little money. Its ironic maker had carved the head of the devil up on the tuning head, as if to thumb his nose at the folk prejudice against one of the "devil's instruments."



V. Old-Time Three-Finger Styles

The well-deserved popularity of Bluegrass, or Scruggs-style banjo, during the past two decades has tended to eclipse many of the older styles of banjo picking which use the thumb and two fingers. Bluegrass banjo playing per se is beyond the scope of this book: if you have concluded by now that your interest in mountain banjo lies more in the direction of the exciting complexities of Bluegrass, you can get a good start from the chapter on this style in Pete Seeger's *How to Play the Five-String Banjo*, prepared with the help of Mike Seeger, and from records by musicians like Earl Scruggs, Don Reno, Ralph Stanley, Don Stover, Bill Keith, and many others.

I do not mean to imply that there is a greater cleavage between the old and new three-finger styles than is dictated by the formalized conventions of Bluegrass music. The fact is that Earl Scruggs based his style on the playing of certain North Carolina three-finger banjo pickers, and traditional music has through the years continued to nourish Bluegrass. Conversely, many old-timers, even those who used a three-finger style before Scruggs joined Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys after World War II, have consciously and unconsciously allowed their music to be influenced by the newer styles. Even some of the musicians who use just two fingers like to boast that they can "do with two fingers anything that Scruggs can do with three." This is seldom so, but it bespeaks the great influence Bluegrass has had over folk musicians.

Some old-fashioned three-finger styles are distinctly pre-Scruggs, part of the same linear tradition that Scruggs up-dated. Others are more directly related to popular 19th century minstrel show and parlor varieties of finger-picking, and to largely extinct Negro folk styles. Still others are elaborations of two-finger picking or are simply the results of some creative experimentation to see what could be accomplished with three fingers. Of course there are no clear-cut lines separating these styles, and they influence and blur into one another in endlessly fascinating ways. I'll try to give a sampling of the range of possibilities in a few examples.

The use of three fingers permits a smoother flow from string to string and multiplies the possibilities of various configurations. Old timers use a great number of sequences of fingering to play accompaniments and melodies. These will be most fruitfully considered in the context of specific pieces so that you can see how they are used. But first, to get your fingers working, here are a few basic patterns to practice. Brace your little finger on the banjo head and keep your index and middle fingers poised over the second and first strings respectively. The thumb should be in position to play the 5th, 4th, 3rd, and possibly the second strings. Sound the strings with a short, firm plucking motion, down with the thumb, up with the other two fingers. Avoid long spidery motions—an economy of effort will achieve the cleanest and most even sound. You may or may not want to use a thumb pick and two metal finger picks: I feel that learning is best accomplished without them.

Try these patterns, which use a thumb lead:

① **G TUNING**

① is a "roll" similar to the used in Bluegrass. ② starts out as a forward roll and then reverses the order to MIT, back picking, which you should learn to do as fluently as the forward order. ③ is a figure that begins with a guitar-like bass chord idea followed by an arpeggio outlining of the notes in the chord. This figure was used a lot by Charlie Poole; often he would pluck the thumb, index and middle finger notes of the first chord a little separately in a harp-like effect, instead of simultaneously. ④ is more of the bass chord idea and is usually interspersed with other patterns.

Middle and index finger leads are also possible:

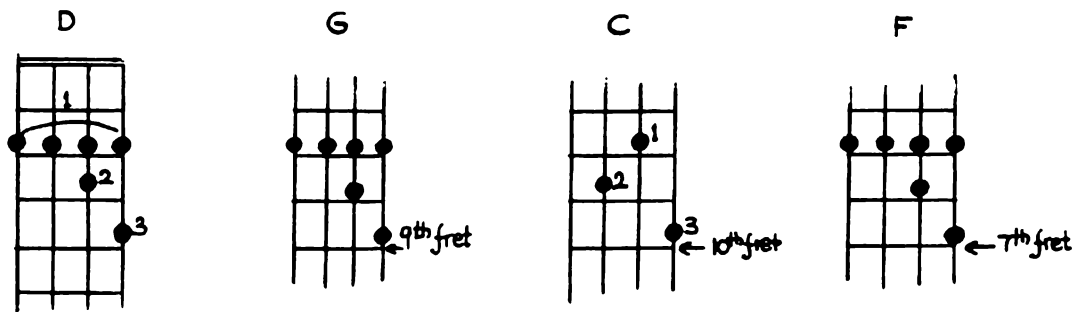
CHARLIE POOLE

Charlie Poole was one of the first Southern banjo players to become famous for a three-finger style and was a very influential figure. He seldom played melody, but his rhythmic chording contributed to the tight distinctive fiddle banjo and guitar string band sound heard on the many records he made with his North Carolina Ramblers between 1925 and his death in 1931. (There are two LP albums of reissues of these classic recordings on the County label.)

Try a modified Charlie Poole style accompaniment to the North Carolina Ramblers' first hit, *Don't Let Your Deal Go Down*, a piece with a strong ragtime flavor. This transcription was taken from Wade Ward's adaptation of what he saw Poole playing: Poole used the same chords and runs, playing in the standard C tuning in the key of F, but his picking was more like pat-

tern ③ above; you should try it both ways. Poole sang on most of his records; try to sing right along with the banjo part, and if you have a couple of friends on fiddle and guitar, so much the better.

Here are the chords you'll use, mostly a movable C formation up and down the neck;



DON'T LET YOUR DEAL GO DOWN

VOCAL LINE **CHORUS**

Don't let your deal go down,
Don't let your deal go down,
D G

for my last— don't let your deal— go— down.
gold dol - lar's— gone.
C F

T T T T T T I M I T I T I T I M I T T M T M

Well, I've been all around this whole round world,
I've done most everything;
I've played cards with the king and the queen,
The ace and the deuce and the trey.

Oh, where did you get those high-top shoes,
Dress that you wear so fine?
Got the shoes from an engineer.
Dress from a driver in the mines.

It should be noted that this style of three-finger picking seems to have come down through the minstrel and medicine shows and for that reason is most often used with songs that bear the stamp of that tradition, like *Shoo Fly* and *Knockin' on the Henhouse Door*, and by performers like Doc Walsh, who have had experience with this genre. A player like Paul Joines, who uses "flyin' hand" down-picking for breakdowns and mountain ballads like *John Hardy*, will tune into C and use three fingers for comic songs like *The Preacher and the Bear*.

DOCK BOGGS

Dock Boggs, the legendary singer and banjo-picker of Norton, Virginia, plays in a variety of three-finger styles. Some are in the category just considered (see *Banjo Clog*, Folkways FA 2392) and some are in a blues vein and combine 3-finger picking with some downward brushing of chords. He also uses a simple three-finger style, playing melody right along with his compelling singing to accompany old ballads, most of which are strongly modal in flavor.

Try the song *Danville Girl* which has a very simple but effective accompaniment in a variant of the D tuning.

DANVILLE GIRL

1. Oh I went down to Dan -
you bet your life she's out of -

*
ville got struck on a Dan - ville girl,
sight she wears those Dan - ville curls.

She wears her hair on the back of her head
Like all high-toned people do.
The very first train that leaves this town
I'm goin' to bid that girl adieu.

I don't see why I love that girl
For she never cared for me,
But still my mind is on that girl
Wherever she may be.

Look up look down this lonesome road
Hang down your head and cry.
The very best friends have to part sometime
Then why not you and I?

It's forty miles through the rock
It's sixty through the sand.
Oh I relate to you the life
Of many a poor married man.

*Boggs sometimes holds this A in the fifth measure for more beats than is shown here. Listen to his recording on FA 2392 for the subtle variations in the voice and banjo that make all the difference in the performance of a song like this.

Note the symbol ↓ (CH) in the sixth tablature measure. It denotes a slight choke—the sharpening of a note not by sliding to a higher fret, but by stretching a string to one side using the finger fretting it. When this is done on the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd strings the string is pushed up toward you, on the 4th, the string is pulled down. This effect is very common in all old-time banjo styles: strings are choked as they are struck, just enough to give them a bite and to bring to the banjo some of the variations in pitch that the voice is capable of, and which would otherwise be impossible on an instrument limited by the half-tones of the fret set-up. The “educated fingers” of traditional banjo players constantly tease and worry the notes to keep their music from sounding too square. But here too, you must develop a sensitive ear in order not to overdo these effects. See the next piece for an example of a more exaggerated choke where a string is raised more than a fraction of a tone.

A NOTE ON GEORGE PEGRAM'S STYLE

You probably noticed that some elements of the Dock Boggs tune given above recall two-finger style. George Pegram of Union Grove, North Carolina, has a raucous, hell-for-leather, driving style that is essentially thumb lead two-finger picking with the middle finger added. If you learn these patterns you can easily work out melodies and accompaniments in his way:



The thumb lead can carry a good bit of melody. Notice the notes that are sounded by the index finger simultaneously with a hammer or the completion of a slide.

PRE-SCRUGGS PICKING—SNUFFY JENKINS

Although Snuffy Jenkins has for years played banjo with The Hired Hands, a semi-Bluegrass band in Columbia, South Carolina, his style pre-dates the style developed by Earl Scruggs. It had its roots however in the same soil as the more modern style; Jenkins learned his music from Smith Hamett and Rex Brooks, two celebrated musicians of the thirties in the Piedmont of North Carolina. They also taught Earl Scruggs and his older brother, Junie. In the particular tune we will consider, still another form of *Goin' Down the Road Feeling Bad*, Jenkins' style lacks the continuous flow of Bluegrass banjo; instead there is a halting quality produced by held beats, and an emphasis on melodic figures. Few notes are included simply to fill out arpeggios in the Bluegrass manner.

LONESOME ROAD BLUES

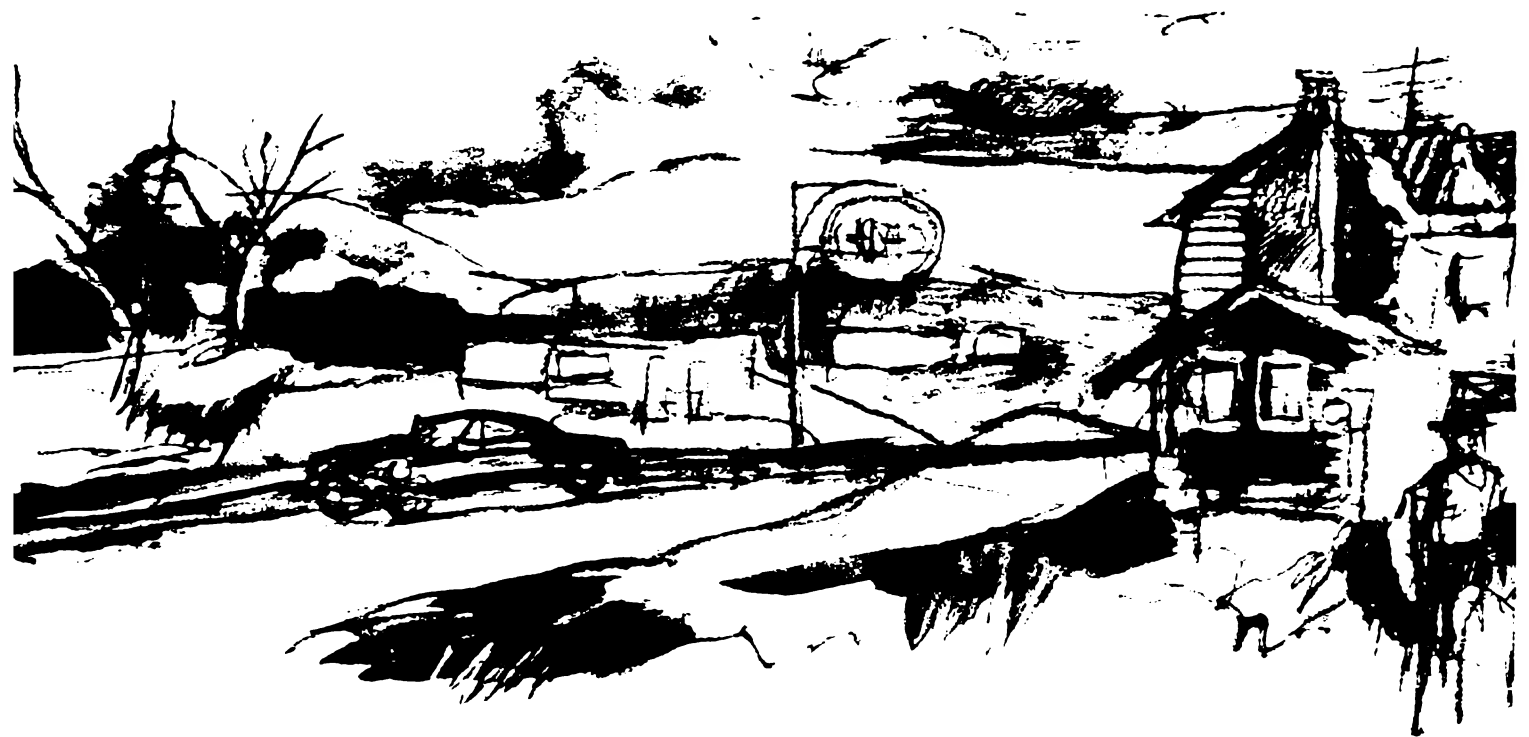
D TUNING

First staff: *rest* *ch half tone* *T* | 12 12 12 9 | 12 9 12 9 | 12 9 7 0 |
 I I T I M T M M I M I Ch T I M

Second staff: *G* 7 0 | 2 2 0 | 2 2 0 2 | 2 3 2 0 0 0 | 2 3 2 0 0 0 |
 I T I M T I T I M T M I T I M I M I T I T I M I |
Ch whole tone

Third staff: *D* 12 12 12 0 | 9 12 7 0 | 0 0 5 0 0 5 0 | 0 and so on ~
 I M I M T M I T I M T M I T I M I T I M |
Ch whole tone

Listen to the original recording of this on *American Banjo, Scruggs Style* Folkways FA 2314, which has several other pre-Bluegrass banjo solos by Jenkins, his cousin Oren Jenkins, Junie Scruggs, J. C. Sutphin and others.



UNCLE DAVE MACON

Dave Macon was an extraordinary entertainer whose recordings have preserved some of the best singing with banjo that the world will ever hear. His career and background have been ably documented elsewhere (see the notes accompanying the reissues on RFB 51 and Decca 4760). It should be noted here, though, that Uncle Dave's music differed in some ways from the mountain banjo tradition which evolved in the isolated coves and hollers. He was born in central Tennessee, grew up in show business, and was exposed from an early age to various Negro instrumental and singing traditions. Thus his repertoire included authentic and pseudo-Negro banjo songs, blues, comic and gospel songs, in addition to folk and parlor songs from other sources. All of these he put across with an expansiveness that was a happy expression through his exuberant personality of all the traditions he had assimilated.

The learning banjo picker may feel a little reticent about twirling his instrument through the air in the middle of a song, or yelling "Hot Dog!" or "Glory, Hallelujah Damn!" during a break. But certainly you should listen to a lot of Uncle Dave's records and try to feel in your own voice and fingers some of the joyous drive and syncopation of this music.

Uncle Dave used frailing down-picking as well as several unorthodox 3-finger techniques on the banjo. Sometimes he used more than one style in a single song, as in *Old Plank Road*, reissued on the Folkways Anthology Vol. III. First he plays a freely-structured 3-finger introduction which anticipates the main melodic ideas of the song. Then he breaks into down-picking, playing the verse part of the melody. Next he sings the verse and chorus, alternately picking and frailing, and finally frails the chorus line as a break between verses, clogging on the floor with his feet all the while.

The banjo is tuned in an open C tuning. (From the 2C tuning, raise the 1st string a whole tone, to E.)



WAY DOWN THE OLD PLANK ROAD

INTRODUCTION (3 finger style)

[illegible]

INTRO. CONT'D. (Down picking)

[illegible]

Notice the figure in the 14th measure of the introduction where four picked notes are clustered into the space of one beat. This is the 3-finger counterpart of the roll in downpicking.

VOCAL LINE (BANJO AD LIB.)



1. Rath-er be in Rich-mond 'midst all the hail and rain, than



for to be in Geor-gia boys wear-in' that ball_ and chain! Won't_



— get drunk no more! Won't get drunk no more!



Won't get drunk no more, way down on Plank Road.

I went down to Mobile for to get on the gravel train,
Very next thing they heard of me had on the ball
and chain!

I'm gwine build me a scaffold upon the mountain
high.
As I can see the Laura girl as she goes ridin' by.

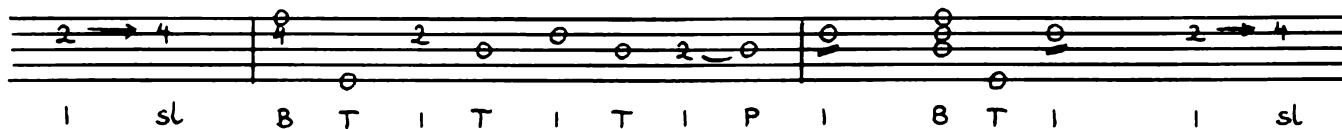
Joanie, oh, dear Joanie, what makes you treat me so?
Caused me to wear the ball and chain now my
ankle's sore!

My wife died Friday night, Saturday she was buried;
Sunday was my courting day, Monday I got married.

Knoxville is a pretty burg, Memphis is a beauty;
'F you want to see those pretty girls, hop to
Chattanooga!

Eighteen pounds of meat a week, whiskey here to
sell.
How can a young man stay at home, pretty girls look
so well!


BREAK (Down picking)



BRICKYARD JOE

T H T H I T I T H I T H I M T I T H T H I T M I T P I T P T P
 T H T H I T I T H I T H I M T I M T M T M T M I T T T I M I
 T T T I T H T I M T M I T M H M I T I T H T I M T M I T
 T H T I T P T T T I T I M M M rest M T M I T
 I T M I T P T I T H T H I T I T H I T H I M T I M H T M T M T M I
 T T T T H T T T M I

then



9th fret

There are many more possible variations of three-finger picking, even within the conventions of the older styles due to the greater number of possible combinations in the order of fingers sounding the strings. Picking out melody is more difficult than with the other styles because the necessary notes do not necessarily fall at the same spot in each sequence, but are often passed from finger to finger in a constantly changing way. Remember that you must contrive to end a measure with a finger other than the one you need to lead off with on the following measure, unless of course the final note is held a full beat.

Try not to get too slick and clever with these styles. It remains for the Bluegrass banjo pickers to produce dazzling virtuoso effects: part of the beauty of the old-fashioned three-finger styles is that they were transitional and hovered with a slightly awkward charm between the old and the new.



AFTERWORD

You may have noticed that *Cripple Creek*, *Old Joe Clark*, *Sally Ann*, and several other classic mountain banjo pieces, do not appear in this book. This is intentional. They belong in your repertoire, so you are pretty much duty-bound to pick them up elsewhere—from recordings or from other musicians. I have chosen just a few of the many fine tunes, well-known or rare, that have come down to us; I have chosen them because they are good tunes but, more important, because they fit into the didactic scheme of this method. But learn the old standbys: sharpen your ear and feeling for the idiom by working out other tunes that excite and inspire you; and check the tunes I have given against the recorded sources when possible—you may catch some licks I missed—and enrich and solidify your playing of those tunes by listening hard to other performances of them.

Whether you strive consciously for it or not, you will find yourself developing your own style, which may mean nothing more than favoring certain sorts of tunes, certain tunings, techniques, and musical ideas, over others—no more than getting a touch that you feel comfortable with. You may want to keep your playing sparse and simple; or you might prefer to work into areas of greater complexity in melodic down-picking, “brushless frailing”, as Stu Jamieson calls it, or in three-finger picking, which, by its very nature, encourages more inventiveness than other styles. Try working out some of the beautiful and complex pieces that John Burke has set down in tablature in his fine book *Old-Time Fiddle Tunes for Banjo*. AmSCO Music Publishing Company. His work will give you great insight into ways in which basically traditional styles can be tastefully and creatively expanded upon (he includes some easier pieces and transcriptions of traditional performances as well as his “impossible” arrangements.)

Most of the good city banjo pickers of old time music have had considerable personal contact and real friendship with country musicians who grew up in the tradition: I think of Pete Seeger, Stu Jamieson, Tom Paley, Pat Dunford, Mike Seeger, John Cohen, to name a few. Others have been able to develop both a technical mastery of and a feeling for the old styles with little or no first-hand contact, but there is much to be said for seeking out non-professional old-timers who live throughout the South and Mid-west, or, if this is not possible, for taking every chance to hear people like Roscoe Holcomb, Doc Watson, Dock Boggs, who at this writing still appear at folk festivals, at college concerts, and in city clubs in the North and West. Something will rub off, as they say.

The emotional and musical content of the old banjo tunes and styles is as strong as ever; a good performance by a country or a city musician who loves and understands them is all they need to keep them alive. It is true enough, though, that the social and cultural conditions that produced

mountain banjo styles are disappearing. The young mountain musicians who take up the banjo nowadays most often turn to the modern Bluegrass music. Those in the country and in the city who devote themselves to the older styles are bound to feel themselves to some extent to be conscious traditionalists. But there is little danger that the new generations of banjo-pickers will assume precious attitudes toward the music, or that their playing will become stilted, so great is the vitality of the mountain banjo tradition, so tough are its sinews. This old music will be around for a long time.



APPENDIX I

Twenty-Three Traditional Tunings

Below you will find all the tunings used in this book and several additional ones, set up for easy reference and use. When chords are used in conjunction with a tuning, the most common chord positions are given. In other cases, most often in modal tunings, open dots are used to indicate fretted notes compatible with the tuning—in most cases you will find that only one fretted note at a time is used.

You will not have much difficulty in getting your banjo into these tunings if you make a practice of going from a more to a less familiar tuning, e.g., from an open D tuning to one of the variant D tunings. If you don't attempt to assimilate too many tunings too quickly you will get the feel and sound of each. Your ear will tell you how much to drop or raise a string to get into the desired tuning. But if you run into trouble, keep this chromatic scale in mind:

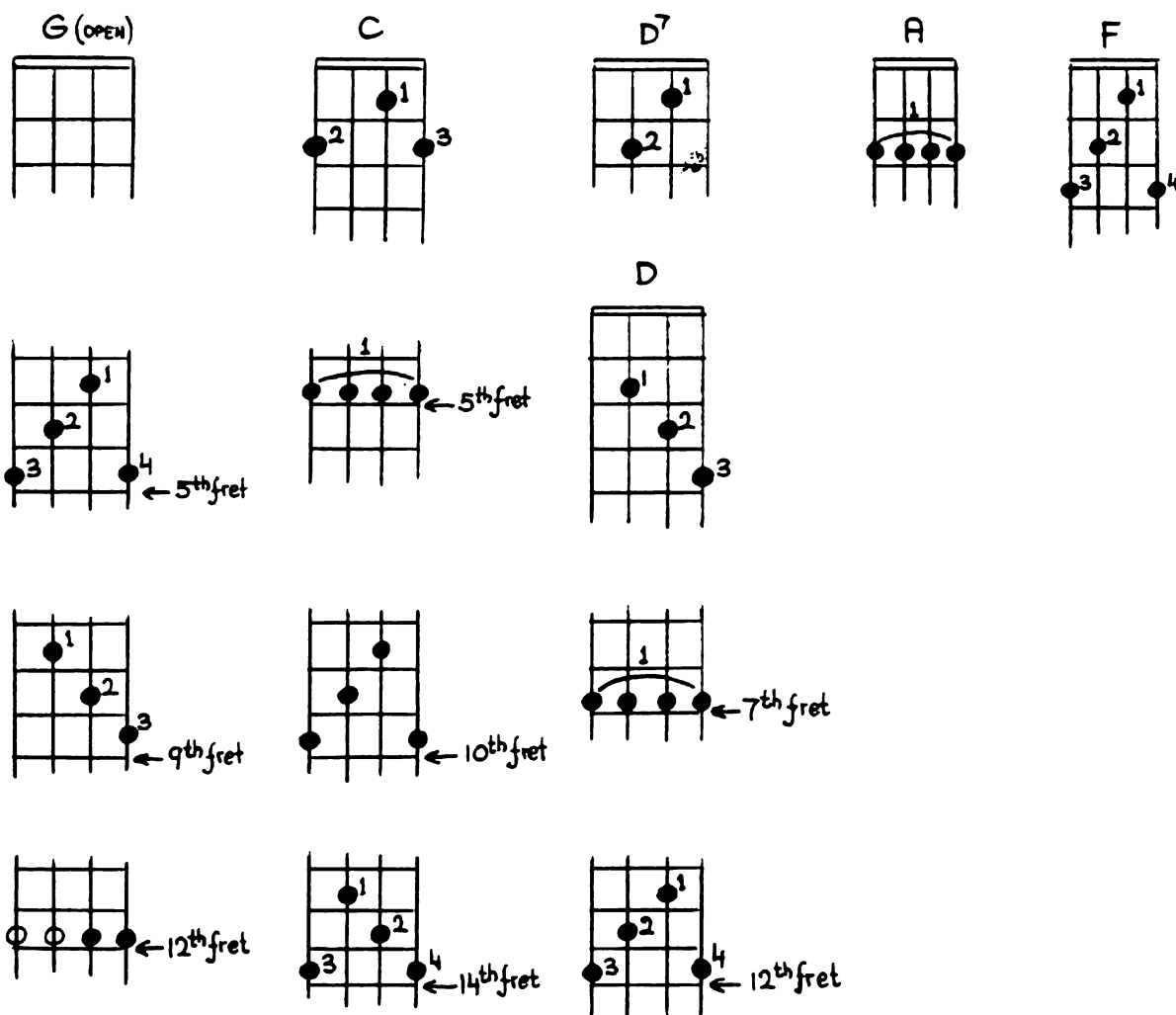
C C# D D# E F F# G G# A A# B C etc.

Each succeeding note represents a half tone, or one fret on the banjo. Now, suppose you are in the G tuning and wish to drop the second string from B to A. The idea is to find the fret that produces an A on the next lower string, the third string. You know that it is tuned to G. A glance at the chromatic scale tells you that A is two half tones, or two frets, above G. So the third string stopped at the second fret produces the A note you wish to tune the second string down to. That is all there is to it.

This list of tunings is by no means complete or definitive. Scores more have been collected from traditional players, and John Cohen and Stu Jamieson are preparing a study to be published in book and/or record form.

I. G TUNINGS

Open G tuning G^DGBD



G^DGA^E



Suggested tunes: *Willie Moore, Sugar Hill*

E^DGBD

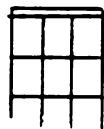
cf. Buell Kazee's *Lady Gay*, transcribed by Pete Seeger in *How to Play the 5-String Banjo*, p. 37.

Try *Pretty Little Miss*, or *Little Rabbit*, using thumb'd 5th string for melody.

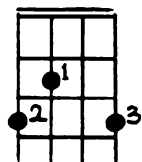
G modal—mountain minor—"sawmill tuning"

G_DGC D

G_{minor} (open)



F



Besides *Pretty Polly* and *Shady Grove*, try *East Virginia*, *The Cuckoo Bird*, and *The House Carpenter*.

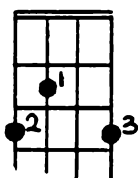
Rufus Crisp used this variant of the mountain minor for *Shady Grove*:

G_FGC D

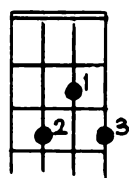
II. F TUNINGS

F tuning ^ADGCD or its variant ^FDGCD

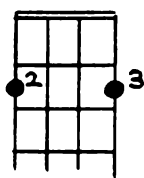
F



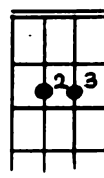
B^b



C

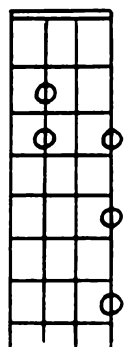


D_m



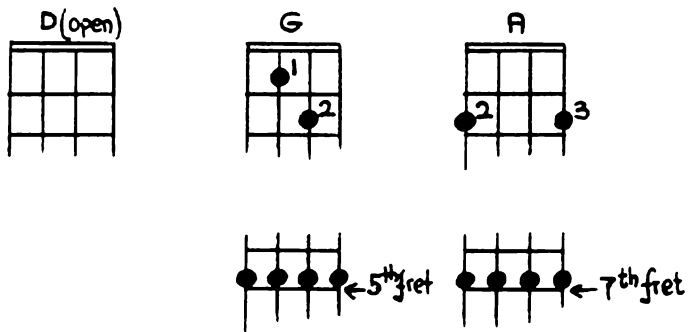
Try *Buck Creek Girls* or *Cumberland Gap* in this tuning.

Closely related to this is the tuning Hobart Smith used for *Last Chance*, ^FDFCD. Cf. Folk Legacy FSA-17, or its variant ^FCFCD. Cf. *Sandy River Belle* played by George Stoneman, County 701.



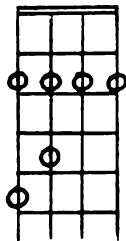
III. D TUNINGS

Open D tuning $F^{\#}DF^{\#}AD$ or its variant $A^{\flat}DF^{\#}AD$



Here is an unusual tuning Roscoe Holcomb uses for an equally unusual version of *On Top of Old Smoky*

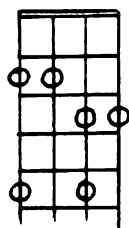
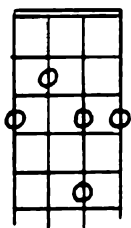
$F^{\#}ADAD$ (the 4th string is an octave lower than the 2nd; the 3rd an octave lower than the 1st)



Here are two D tunings with a minor modal flavor used by Dock Boggs:

$F^{\#}DGAD$ (Cf. *Danville Girl*)

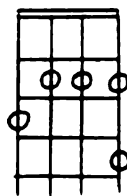
$F^{\#}CGAD$



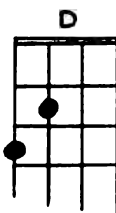
And still a third variant $D^{\flat}DGAD$ (Cf. *Little Sadie*)

Try these tunings for *Cumberland Gap*

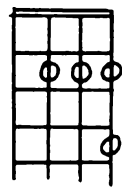
F#BEAD



A^BBEAD

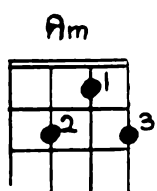
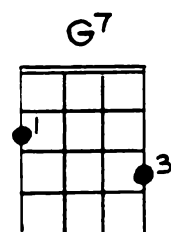
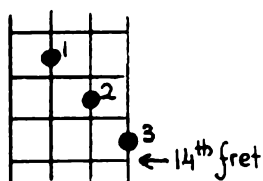
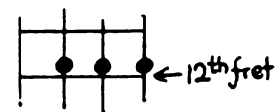
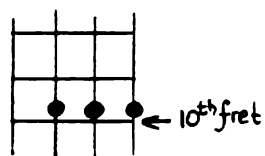
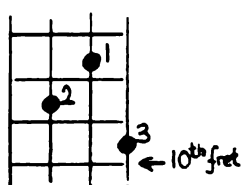
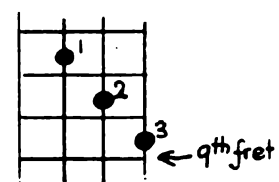
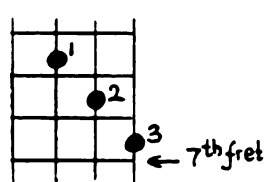
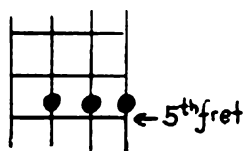
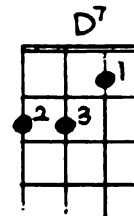
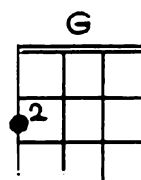
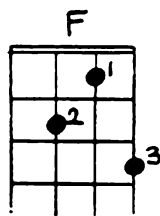
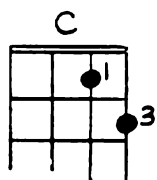


F#DEAD



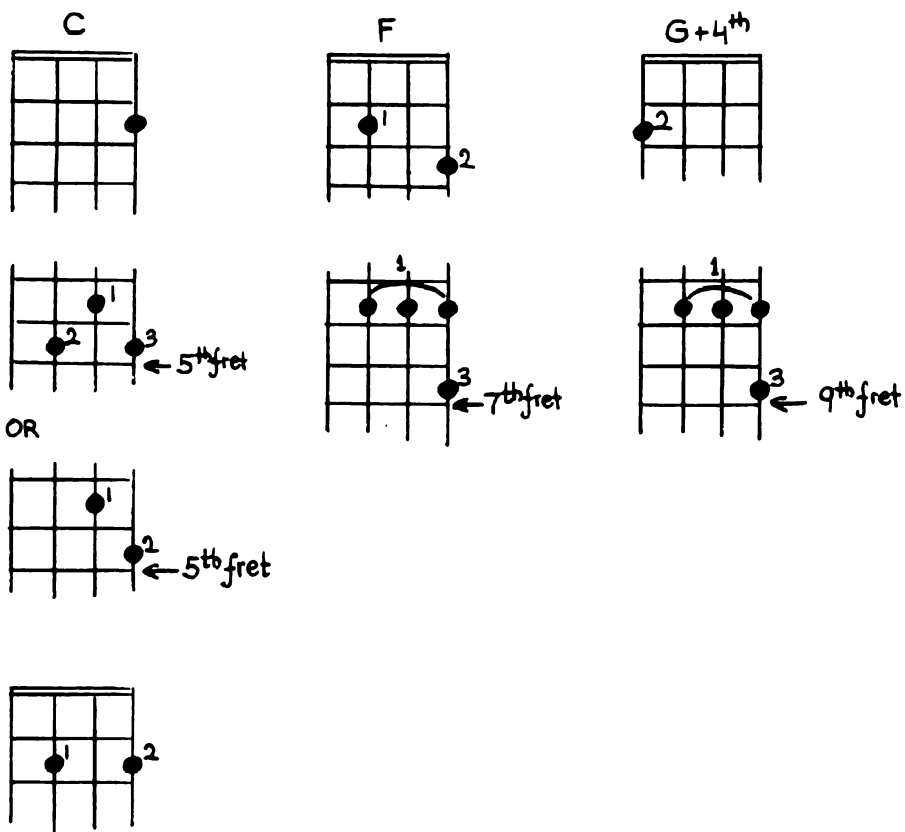
IV. C TUNINGS

"Standard" C tuning GCGBD

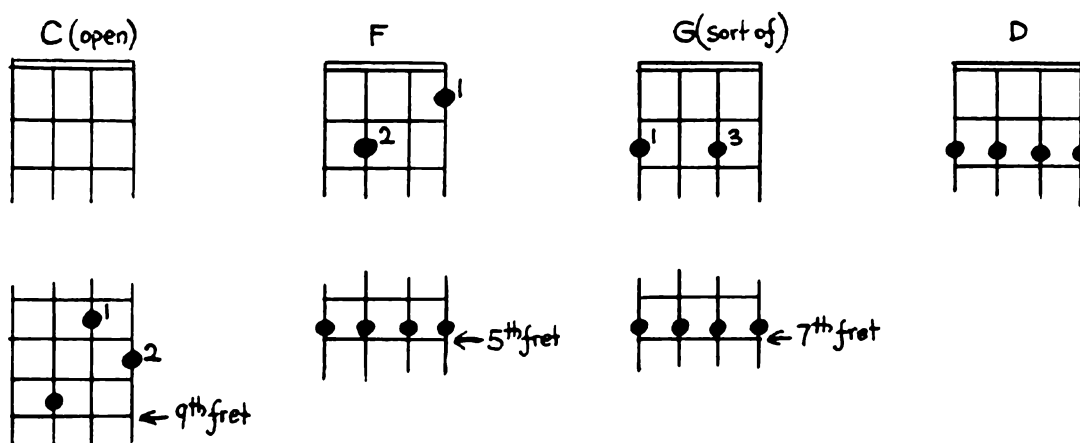


Two C tuning $GCGCD$

Variant for *Heavy-Loaded Freight Train* $E_C GCD$

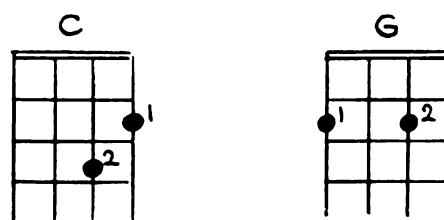


Open C tuning $GCGCE$



Little Birdie tunings $E_C GAD$

$G_C GAD$



APPENDIX II

What Kind of Banjo Should You Have?

Some of the finest banjo picking through the years has been done on modest instruments, cheap mail-order banjos, simple home-made instruments, and, in an earlier time, on banjos fashioned from gourds. These days Bluegrass musicians insist on banjos with elaborate tone rings and resonators on the back to project forward an exceedingly bright sound. But the older traditional styles sound fine on a basic instrument with a good drum head, pegs which will hold once the banjo has been tuned, a perfectly straight finger board, and an action (the distance of the strings from the finger board) low enough to permit the strings to be fretted easily up and down the neck. A bad action can usually be corrected by raising or lowering the bridge or adjusting the neck—if the banjo is essentially sound.

Beyond these minimum requirements, much depends on personal taste and preference. After you have played for a while you will know whether you like a plunky or a clear ringing tone; whether you want a loud, fast response to a light touch, or prefer a banjo that requires a more vigorous attack. You will know whether you want a tone ring, and if so, what kind, and whether or not you want a resonator (most people would rather do down-picking and two-finger picking on banjos without resonators, although this feeling is far from universal—my own all-round “working” banjo is a thirty-year old Vega with resonator). But if you are just starting out and want to invest in the best instrument you can find and afford—not an unwise decision—you will have to rely on good advice and your own intuition.

One rule that pretty always holds true is to buy a good old instrument rather than a new one, if possible. If you can spend, say, \$50, you will get a modern mass-produced banjo with little to recommend it other than the fact that it plays; but you might find for the same amount a simple old banjo with a nice tone and very likely handsome lines, fine workmanship, and possibly an inlay or two on the finger board. By the same token, medium quality new Vega and Gibson banjos, certainly worthy instruments, just start at around \$200, and the best made are considerably more. But \$200 will get you a really superb old Stewart, if you are lucky enough to find one.

Fine craftsmanship did not come as dear in the old days as it does today, and some of the early Fairbanks', Stewarts, Coles, and Paramounts are beautiful works in both detail and overall lines. And aside from the fact that these old banjos usually sound good, it is decidedly inspiring to own and play a handsome instrument. This can be carried too far, and some banjo buffs become so entranced by mother-of-pearl and fancy carving that they pass up many a fine-sounding but less flashy looking banjo. The corollary to this is that you

should not scorn a banjo that is in some way peculiar looking—some great banjos are unusual or odd in appearance. Also, do not overlook some old banjo gathering dust in the back of a shop because it lacks a head, brackets, or pegs. These parts can easily be replaced, and you may have an excellent instrument.

I feel that the extra long-necked banjos with their three extra frets are of only limited desirability. They are unwieldy, and any way, in a pinch, a normal banjo can be tuned down a whole tone or so. But many good banjos had their necks extended during the vogue for long-necked banjos a few years ago, and some companies, notably Ode, produced decent long-necked models.



APPENDIX III

A Selected Discography

Most of the LP records listed below are currently available. Old-time mountain banjo music is reasonably well-documented on phonograph records, both reissues of old commercial and field recordings, and recent recordings of traditional players. This was not the case just a few years ago when only a sketchy idea of the scope of the music could be obtained from the records then in print.

The Archive of American Folksong at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., has released some excellent field recordings of banjo playing made over 25 years ago. Check their catalogue. AAFS L2 has more banjo material than the other records, including cuts by Pete Steele, Wade Ward, Herbert Smoke, and Thaddeus Willingham. These and others like Justus Begley and Rufus Crisp, appear intermittently on L1, L7, L9, and L20.

The Folkways *Anthology of American Folk Music*, edited by Harry Smith, FA 2951/3, reissued on LP many 78 sides of early commercial records from the late 20s and early 30s which feature banjo pickers like Uncle Dave Macon, Charlie Poole, Buell Kazee, Bascom Lunsford, Clarence Ashley, Dock Boggs, and Burnett and Rutherford.

County Records, 307 E. 37th Street, New York, N.Y., has released several LPs of reissued old 78s. There are occasional selections with just voice and banjo but most often the banjo is heard in the context of the old time string band. Check out CO505, *Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers*; CO 506, *Gid Tanner's Skillet Lickers*; CO 504, *Mountain Songs*; CO 502, *Mountain Ballads*; CO 511, *Mountain Blues*; CO 508, *Mountain Sacred Songs*; CO 512, *A Day in the Mountains*; CO 507, *Old Time Fiddle Classics*; and CO 509, *Charlie Poole*, Vol. II.

Old Timey Records, Box 5073, Berkeley, Calif., has a similar group of reissues: OT100, *The String Bands, Vol. I*; OT 102, *Ballads and Songs*; and OT 101, *The String Bands, Vol. II*.

A fine reissue set by Victor is *Smoky Mountain Ballads*, LPV-507, with cuts by Wade Mainer, and Uncle Dave Macon.

RFB Records RF 51 has re-released 16 great sides of *Uncle Dave Macon*. Included in the notes is a complete Uncle Dave discography.

Decca Dec 4760 is another LP of important *Uncle Dave* reissues.

In recent years there have been several good regional collections of field recordings devoted entirely or in part to banjo picking.

Folkways 2317, *Mountain Music of Kentucky*, has a lot of thumb-lead two-finger picking by Roscoe Holcomb and Lee Sexton, and some rare recordings of the late Banjo Bill Cornett.

Music of Grayson and Carroll Counties, Folkways FS 3811, is a collection from Virginia with banjo played in the clawhammer style by Vester Jones, Wade Ward and others. Some good fretless banjo.

CO 701, *Clawhammer Banjo*, is a superb documentation of a particularly interesting style as employed by Wade Ward, Fred Cockerham, Kyle Creed, and George Stoneman. Some good banjo-fiddle cuts, and fine fretless banjo by Cockerham. Informative notes, and tunings given.

CO 709, *The Camp Creek Boys*, offers more of Creed and Cockerham, this time with a full string band on most numbers.

Tradition TLP 1007, *Instrumental Music of the Southern Appalachians*, has some good banjo tunes by Hobart Smith and others.

Riverside RLP 12-610, *Banjo Songs of the Southern Mountains* was recorded in 1955 of performers from around Asheville, N.C. like Samantha Bumgarner, Harry West, George Pegram, and Obay Ramsey. It has been re-released on the Washington label.

Old Time Music at Clarence Ashley's Vols 1-2, Folkways FA 2355, FA 2359, have singing and picking by the late Tom Ashley, and banjo work by Doc Watson, and others, set in a context of ballad singing and back porch music making.

The Watson Family, FA 2366, also has good banjo picking in an especially meaningful context. Check the Vanguard catalogue for other records featuring Doc Watson.

The Stoneman Family, FA 2315, has some old-style banjo picking by Pop Stoneman, as well as a number of tunes in various styles including archaic three-finger picking, by other musicians.

The Carolina Tar Heels, Folk Legacy FSA-24 presents a reunion of one of the fine old groups.

The Poplin Family, FA 2306, a family group from South Carolina.

American Banjo, Scruggs Style, Folkways FA 2314. In spite of its name, this album presents many examples of fine pre-Bluegrass three-finger picking by J.C. Sutphin, Snuffy Jenkins, Oren Jenkins, and Junie Scruggs.

On *Foggy Mountain Banjo*, Col. 1564, the master Bluegrass picker, Earl Scruggs, harks back to many of the tunes and styles on the above collection.

Carolina Bluegrass, Folk-Lyric FL 123, Snuffy Jenkins' three-finger style in a more or less Bluegrass setting.

Old Timers of the Grand Old Opry, Folkways FA 2379, has some old-time three-finger picking by Sam and Kirk McGee.

Following are a group of LPs devoted to one or two musicians:

Pete Steele, Banjo Tunes and Songs, Folkways 3828, a collection spanning Steele's wide range of east Kentucky styles.

Clarence Ashley and Tex Isley, Folkways 2330, Tom Ashley teamed up with a good auto-harp player and singer.

Dock Boggs, FA 2351, and *Dock Boggs, Vol. 2*, FA 2392, recent recordings of one of the most moving and fascinating of the old-timers.

Frank Proffitt Sings Folk Songs, FA 2360. A fine gentle singer using the fretless banjo as an accompanying instrument.

Frank Proffitt, Folk Legacy FSA1. More of the same.

The Music of Wade Ward and Roscoe Holcomb, FA 2363, contrasts the Virginia clawhammer or drop-thumb with the Kentucky two-finger picking, as performed by two masters of their respective styles. Also two AAFS cuts of the famous Bogtrotters of Galax, Va.

The High Lonesome Sound, FA 2368, a solo record by Roscoe Holcomb.

Buell Kazee, FA 3810, ballads, tunes and interviews.

Pickin' and Blowin', Riverside RLP 12-650. Wild three-finger picking and singing by George Pegram, with mouth harp by Red Parham.

Smoky Mountain Ballads, Folkways FP 40, an old 10-inch LP of fine performances by Bascom Lamar Lunsford.

The Appalachian Minstrel, Washington VM 736. More good Lunsford.

Banjo Songs from the Blue Ridge, Riverside 12-694, Obray Ramsey is a gifted North Carolina singer whose banjo style is a graceful blend of old and new three-finger styles.

Hobart Smith, Folk Legacy, FSA-17. Many amazing drop-thumb banjo solos, and a classic example of the interweaving of voice and banjo on the *Cuckoo Bird*. Good notes, tunings given, and an analysis of Smith's style and the tablature for "Last Chance" by Fleming Brown.

John Jackson, Arhoolie 1025. A Negro singer from Virginia plays some highly unusual sounding banjo tunes.

Traditional Music for Banjo, Fiddle, and Bagpipes, Kanawha 307. Frank George of West Virginia plays several lovely, complex clawhammer pieces.

Grandpa Jones—Real Folk Songs, Monu 8021. A popular hillbilly performer who specializes in old-time frailing.

Finally, here are some records featuring urban performers who adhere pretty much to the mountain traditions. There are many interesting city banjo players who have used the old styles chiefly as a point of departure for their personal experimentation. Their work is often interesting but is outside the scope of this book.

Pete Seeger has a deep respect for the old traditions, and quite authentic banjo picking is interspersed on his records with his more hybrid styles.

See the Folkways catalogue for the records of the New Lost City Ramblers, all of which have a lot of excellent banjo picking based on the best traditional models.

Mike Seeger has two solo records with several banjo cuts each: *Old Time Music*, Folkways 2325, and *Vanguard*, *Mike Seeger*, Van 9150.

Folk Banjo Styles, Elektra 7-217, has several exemplary tunes and songs by Tom Paley, as well as several pieces in various styles by the author of this manual.

Old-Time Banjo Project, Elektra S 7-276, features playing by Hank Schwartz, Bob Siggins, Peter Siegel, John Cohen, Bill Vanaver, and Winnie Winston.

String Band Project, Elektra 7-292 has three cuts with Stu Jamieson, protege of the great old-timer, Rufus Crisp.

The Old Reliable String Band, Folkways 2475. More banjo by Tom Paley.

Folk Legacy has a good disc in their Interpreter series by Chicago banjo-picker and teacher Fleming Brown.